

**THE MOTIF OF THE BULL IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST:  
AN ICONOGRAPHIC STUDY**

by

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submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of

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**UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR P.S. VERMAAK**

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I, Renate Marian van Dijk, declare that *The Motif of the Bull in the Ancient Near East: An Iconographic Study* is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

26 February 2011

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## **SUMMARY**

The bull was a potent symbol of power, strength, and, to a lesser degree, fertility to the peoples of the ancient Near East from the twelfth century until 330 BCE. This symbolism was manifested in several iconographic motifs. These motifs reveal the bull as a manifestation of divine characteristics and as an expression of the power of man, and particularly the authority of the king. The use of these iconographic motifs was not consistent across the entire area of the ancient Near East; some differed in appearance and use in the different areas of the region, and many changed over time even in the same area. In all areas and during all periods the basic core symbolism stayed the same, and the bull was always held in a special respect.

## **KEY TERMS**

Bull; Ancient Near East; Iconography; Bucrania; Contest Scenes; Royal Hunt; Horned Headdress of Divinity; Deities; Sacrifice; Bull-Leaping; Gateway Guardian Figures

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# THE MOTIF OF THE BULL IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST: AN ICONOGRAPHIC STUDY

## INTRODUCTION

Cattle, and in particular bulls, are found in the art and iconography of the ancient Near East from prehistoric neolithic times until the conquest of Alexander of Macedon, the traditional temporal 'end' of the era. A multitude of examples are found from every area of the ancient Near East; from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant.

The predominance of the bull in art and iconography is significant, because cattle rarely contribute more than ten to fifteen percent of faunal remains at sites (Hesse 1995:214). For example, at Çatalhöyük, a settlement well-known for its bull imagery cattle make up only 10 percent of faunal remains, but 46 percent of reliefs, and 54 percent of installations, compared to sheep which make up 56 percent of faunal remains, but only 19 percent of reliefs and 13 percent of installations (Hodder 2006:9).

The bulls depicted in ancient Near Eastern art generally did not represent modern domestic cattle, although this species did exist. Three forms of wild cattle existed in the area; the wisent (*Bison bonasus*), the arni- or water buffalo (*Bubalus bubalis*), and the aurochs (*Bos primigenius*). The wisent had a flat hump at the shoulders, a heavy mane and beard, and short, crescent-like horns. The water buffalo was large with huge crescent-shaped horns which were twice as long as its head. The water buffalo became extinct in the ancient Near East around 2500<sup>1</sup> and the wisent around 2000 (Bodenheimer 1960a:202).

The motif of the bull in the ancient Near East is especially associated with the aurochs. The aurochs was the ancestor of modern cattle, and had a straight back and horns that were as long as its head. This beast could weigh over a tonne, and stood two metres at the shoulder. It is easy then to comprehend why "bull symbolism is associated with male virility, power and wealth"

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<sup>1</sup>All dates in this dissertation are BCE (Before the Common Era) unless specifically stated to be CE (Common Era).

(Ruether 2006:26). Conrad (1959:29) elaborates on this concept, asserting that the bull became “a symbol of the all-powerful and the all-fertile, in short, a god.” He is not alone in this assertion. Cauvin (2000:123) has gone so far as to call the Pre-Pottery Neolithic B people the “people of the bull”, while an Israelite Bull Cult into historic times is argued for by scholars such as Meek (1921) and Waterman (1915). In this way, bull imagery was long explained to be the focus of a bull cult.

While there is undoubtedly a prevalence of bull imagery and symbolism in ancient Near Eastern thought, this does not necessarily mean that there was a bull cult. Oates (1978:124) argues that in Mesopotamia as early as the sixth millennium, “there is no persuasive evidence for... a ‘bull cult.’” There were cultic objects which were in the form of the bull, and bulls were involved in ritual activities, but this does not mean that the bull itself was the focus of worship. There can be little doubt that bulls were associated with divinities. At times the bull acted as the manifestation of a god or accompanied a deity<sup>2</sup>, but it was always the gods who were worshipped. Bulls were not divinities. In fact, according to Postgate (1994:164), in Mesopotamia by the Old Babylonian Period, cattle were considered to be part of the family unit, and “were given names just like any other member of the family.” These animals were clearly loved and respected, but it is hard to believe that such familiarity would elicit the feelings of awe and reverence with which religious cults are connected. Although these cattle represent the domestic variety, the distinction between god and beast would also have been made for their wild cousins.

Today most scholars have moved away from the idea of a bull cult<sup>3</sup>. Instead, the concept of the bull in the ancient Near East should be understood as the expression of the power and fertility of this great beast, and how the people of the ancient Near East related to, were in awe of, and aspired to these qualities.

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<sup>2</sup>See *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*.

<sup>3</sup>There are, however, some scholars, such as Cauvin (2000) and Rice (1998) who still favour this view.

## 1. HYPOTHESIS

The aim of this dissertation is to examine how the motif of the bull was manifested in the art and iconography of the ancient Near East.

The ‘ancient Near East’<sup>4</sup> covers a vast area and a large timespan. Because the scope is so large, by necessity not all aspects of bull iconography can be covered. This study will therefore attempt to discuss various specific themes in the representation of the concept of the bull. Similarities and differences in how these themes were portrayed will be examined, and, where applicable, evolutions in the depiction and in the meaning of these themes will be traced.

This study was undertaken because no other comprehensive study of the iconography of the bull in the ancient Near East exists<sup>5</sup>. Certain aspects, like bull-leaping, have been studied extensively by other scholars, but little or no work has been done in other areas, like the use of the horned headdress in Anatolia. This has left an important gap in our understanding of ancient Near Eastern society and culture. What symbolic role did the bull play? How was this portrayed in the different areas and at different times in the ancient Near East? The purpose of this dissertation is to fill that gap in our understanding.

## 2. SOURCES

As this dissertation is an iconographic study, the primary sources of my research are artworks and artefacts relating to bull imagery. Ancient Near Eastern bull imagery is found in objects as small as a fingertip or as big as a house.

Many of the larger works are still extant in their original form (such as the Assyrian palace reliefs) and original archaeological context (such as the bucrania and wall paintings from Çatalhöyük) but few of the smaller pieces can still be seen *in situ*. While photographs or sketches of many pieces can be found in books or online, my research took me to three museums where I could examine works first hand: the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris and

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<sup>4</sup>As defined in the opening paragraph of the Introduction.

<sup>5</sup>See discussion below.

the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin. Several pieces in these museums are not discussed in published works and I could not have learned of their existence any other way. These original pieces serve as my primary sources. Without seeing them in their original form, I would not have been able to make certain observations. For example, I would not have noticed the bull sacrifice scene on Eannatum's Stele of Vultures, because this piece of the stele is seldom published, even though it is on display in the Louvre.

Where an artwork itself was not available, images or descriptions and discussions of that piece will be used instead. These secondary sources either take the form of specialised books or academic papers on the subject, or translations of ancient texts, or images of the pieces available online. The websites of the British Museum (<http://www.britishmuseum.org/research.aspx>) and the Louvre ([http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=crt\\_frm\\_rs&langue=en&initCritere=true](http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=crt_frm_rs&langue=en&initCritere=true)) have proven to be invaluable sources for images of artefacts. Various websites, such as *Monuments of the Hittites* (<http://www.hittitemonuments.com/>) also provide images of specialised subjects, in this case photographs of Hittite archaeological sites.

Translations of ancient Near Eastern texts are also utilised to elucidate and substantiate findings. Linguistic studies may classify these texts as secondary sources, but, as mine is an iconographic study and they provide original information, they can be classified as primary sources. These works include the Bible, the Epic of Gilgamesh, Herodotus' *Histories*, as well as several royal texts<sup>6</sup>.

Secondary sources include specialised journal articles and books which study specific aspects of bull iconography. Examples include Evans' study of Minoan bull-leaping depictions (1921), the studies of the relationship of the winged human-headed bulls from Assyria and the Biblical Cherubim by Ravenshaw (1856) and Foote (1904), and Waterman's *Bull-Worship in Israel* (1915). In *The Power of the Bull* (1998), Rice examines various aspects of bull imagery, but his work is premised on the notion that the bull was the focal point of a cult. As a result he

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<sup>6</sup>All biblical quotations are from the New English Version, all quotes from the Epic of Gilgamesh are from the translation by George (2003), and all quotations from Herodotus' *Histories* are from the translation by Rawlinson (1996) unless otherwise stated.

overlooks certain aspects of bull imagery.

Because little research has been done into most areas of bull iconography, there are relatively few relevant secondary sources. Much of the information therefore came from tertiary sources. These consist of books and encyclopaedia regarding more general information about the ancient Near East, or discussions regarding topics not ostensibly relating to the bull. For example, Bunnens (2006), although studying a series of stelea depicting the Syro-Hittite Storm God, provides a very useful discussion on the bull associated with this god, and Van Buren (1945), who discusses Mesopotamian religious iconography, provides much information regarding the bull as a symbol of the gods. Many depictions of bull imagery on cylinder seals are found in a recent work by Collon (2005).

There is an abundance of iconography associated with the bull in the ancient Near East, but not all of these are useful in relation to this particular study. Egyptian pastoral models of cattle pulling a plough and ostraca from Deir el-Medina decorated with paintings of similar scenes, for example, have been omitted because they depict real, mundane events, and my study will focus on the bull as a symbol. Early Dynastic Sumerian statuettes of bulls have also not been discussed because their context is usually uncertain, and their meaning is therefore unknown.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The nature of available sources determines the methodology of any study. As previously mentioned, few publications focussing on the symbolism and iconography of the bull in ancient Near Eastern culture exist. While there is therefore a limited pool of secondary sources to work from, the relative wealth of primary sources (the works themselves) were nonetheless still extant and available for study. Using earlier studies (see bibliography), the conventions for various areas of periods can be traced. This existing research is cited and new conclusions drawn based on previous findings.

Keel (1997:7) holds that ancient Near Eastern imagery was “not intended to be viewed, like paintings of nineteenth or twentieth-century European art (*Sehbild*), but rather to be read

(*Denkbild*).” By this he means that ancient Near Eastern artworks and images portrayed a meaning other than their outward appearance. In a sense, all ancient Near Eastern art, even when documenting real events, was symbolic. In the case of depictions of the bull, it was generally characteristics associated with the bull, such as strength, martial power, authority and fertility - or more accurately virility - which were being portrayed or implied. Any depiction of a bull must therefore be ‘read’ in its specific context in order to understand its precise meaning. The aim of this dissertation is to examine the different iconographic contexts in which the bull was portrayed. However, as Lewis (2005:76) points out, “iconography complements texts, it cannot replace them.” Looking at images alone provides few answers. An artefact must be placed within its historical and archaeological context for it to have a discernible meaning. This can only be achieved through the analytical study of previous academic works and in some cases the ancient texts themselves. Therefore, it would be impossible to discuss the practice of bull-leaping<sup>7</sup> without referring to Evans’ (1921) study of the various types of bull-leaping representation. While the gateway guardian figures<sup>8</sup> would clearly have functioned as objects to inspire awe in the Assyrian king’s subjects because of their size and appearance, their function as protective beings is revealed on *Cylinder A* of the *Esarhaddon Inscriptions*. For this reason, although the focus of this dissertation will be on the art and iconography of the ancient Near East, supporting data from recent academic works can not be ignored. Ancient texts too will be used where applicable.

While certain aspects of bull symbolism are abundant in texts, they are not apparent in iconography. These are mentioned where relevant, but are not discussed in detail because the focus of this dissertation is on visual associations. Therefore, while many scholars have studied the relationship between Baal and Dumuzi in texts<sup>9</sup>, in-depth discussions of these relationships are omitted from this study. While related to the motif of the bull in ancient Near Eastern thought, they are not applicable to the motif of the bull in ancient Near Eastern visual iconography.

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<sup>7</sup>Bull-leaping is discussed in *Chapter 10: Bull-Leaping*.

<sup>8</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 11: The Bull and Composite Bull Figures as Protective Beings*.

<sup>9</sup>For examples, see Kapelrud (1952) and Sefati (1998) respectively.

Iconographic studies usually focus on religious iconography, and other symbols, or meanings of symbols, are overlooked. In this manner, although Othmar Keel is a pioneer in the field of ancient Near Eastern iconography, few of his studies offer new insight into the symbolism of the bull, except *Mond, Stier und Kult am Stadttor; Die Stele von Besaida (et-Tell)* (1998), which is co-written with Monika Bernett. The focus of their study, however, is on the relationship between the bull and the Moon God, and other aspects of bull iconography are not included in the work. For this reason, only works relevant to this particular study have been used for reference and cited.

Certain artefacts such as bucrania, decorative bulls' heads, and horned altars would usually be classified as archaeological sources because they are cultural objects and not visual representations. However, because their meaning and symbolism are related to other traditionally iconographic motifs, in this dissertation they are also classified as iconography. This study therefore focusses on the symbolism of the bull in iconographic sources and in archaeological sources where applicable.

#### 4. OUTLINE

This dissertation is divided into four sections. Although several chapters could arguably fall into more than one category, they are discussed in the section which seems most relevant.

Section A deals with the bull and its function in daily life. This does not mean that the bull's role in agriculture and farming will be discussed, but rather its more symbolic role in daily life. The bull as a symbol formed an integral part of daily life in the ancient Near East.

Chapter 1 discusses bucrania. A bucranium is the skull of a bull, and can refer to the skulls and horn cones of real animals, or to heads modelled entirely from plaster. Bucrania are found in architecture and burials from sites across the ancient Near East. Various arguments have been put forward regarding the function of bucrania. Although Cyprus is generally not considered part of the ancient Near East, ancient Near Eastern bucrania cannot be studied without reference to those found on the island.

Decorative bulls' heads are discussed in chapter 2. These bull's heads differ from bucrania in that, while bucrania are the actual remains of bull skulls, decorative bull's heads are artistic reproductions. The most famous bull's heads include those attached to lyres from Early Dynastic Mesopotamia. A variety of decorative bull's heads are discussed and compared to identify similarities and differences in their use and function.

Contest Scenes, representing fights between wild animals and mythological beings, are discussed in chapter 3. Contest scenes originally and primarily decorated cylinder seals, but are also found in a variety of other media. Two types of contest scene, the animal contest scene, in which only animals are the combatants, and mythological contest scenes, in which beings such as the nude hero and the bull-man also take part, are discussed. A notable example of animal combat was the struggle between the lion and the bull, which was further illustrated in the motif of the Anzu bird and the bull or human-headed bull.

Section B discusses how the ruler identified or associated himself with the bull and some of its most important and beneficent characteristics, namely its strength and martial power, in order to express his own power and authority.

In chapter 4 the relationship between the ruler and the bull is examined. The king portrayed himself as a bull, wishing to be associated with the power and fertility which the bull possessed. In Egypt this portrayal was in iconographic sources, while in other areas of the ancient Near East, it was in texts. The Egyptian examples are studied and compared to the textual examples from Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant.

The ruler would also wish to portray himself as more powerful than the bull, and this was achieved through his victory over the beast in the royal bull hunt. Chapter 5 traces the development from the bull hunt as a necessary event to safeguard and provide for the community to a symbolic affirmation of the king's right to rule. The iconography is supported by textual evidence.

Section C discusses the relationship between deities and the bull. While certain gods were

identified or associated with the bull, goddesses were naturally associated more often with cows.

Chapter 6 discusses the use and development of the horned headdress to denote divinity. These headdresses are evident particularly in the art of Mesopotamia, but also in that of Anatolia and the Levant. Although the horned headdress is a well-known mark of divinity, very few studies have been done on it.

The various gods across the ancient Near East which were identified or associated with the bull are discussed in chapter 7. Some bulls in Egypt were seen as the earthly manifestation of certain gods. Gods in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant, especially the Storm and Moon gods, were more commonly depicted in association with the bull.

The relationship between certain goddesses and the cow and bull is discussed in chapter 8. Although it was more frequent that the gods were portrayed or associated with bulls, goddesses were also identified with cows, or associated with cattle. The focus of this chapter will be on iconography, with supporting textual references.

The bull was an important figure in the religious or ritual practices across the ancient Near East. These are discussed in Section D.

Chapter 9 deals with the practice of bull sacrifice. Texts describing sacrifices are found from Mesopotamia and, especially, in the Bible. Bull sacrifice is alluded to in myths such as the encounter between Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven, and in the Persian myth of Mithra. In comparison to the textual evidence, iconographic examples of definite bull sacrifice are rare. These images, and some altars with bull iconography, are discussed.

The practice of bull-leaping is discussed in chapter 10. Sources for the practice are almost completely iconographical, although a Luwian text and a passage in the Bible are also discussed. Many representations of bull-leaping are known from Minoan Crete, and, although not considered a part of the ancient Near East, a complete study would not be possible without discussing these works.

Bulls and composite bull figures acted as protective figures to individuals as well as to cities and empires. These are discussed in chapter 11. The majority of sources are from Mesopotamia, but examples also exist from Anatolia and the Levant.

## SECTION A: THE BULL AND DAILY LIFE

### CHAPTER 1: BUCRANIA

*Bucrania are found in assemblages or depicted on artefacts from sites across Anatolia, Nubia, Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Levant. Archaeological and iconographical examples will be studied to find differences and similarities in symbolism and function in the different areas of the ancient Near East.*

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

The ancient Near Eastern peoples' fascination with the bull can be traced back to prehistoric Neolithic times. Bucrania<sup>10</sup> have been excavated at sites covering a wide geographic region - from Anatolia, Nubia, Egypt, the Levant, Cyprus and Mesopotamia - as well as a large timespan - from the Neolithic Period until at least the rule of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal in the seventh century.

There have been various arguments and theories regarding their meaning or function. Bucrania have been seen as a religious symbol, being associated with both a god (Cauvin 2000:31-32) and a goddess (Gimbutas 2001:35). They have also been understood to act as totems, representing not a divinity, but the group of people with which they are associated (Steel 2004:290). They have been interpreted as representing objects of sacrifice, and in this capacity have been linked with funerary or mortuary rites. McInerney (2010:37) believes the bucrania to be representative of the hunt. Marangou and Grammenos (2005:12) argue against this interpretation, stating that, at least at the time of the earliest bucrania, "wild bovids were not hunted then and use of their skulls does not reflect familiarity," and suggest instead that the bucrania could serve to symbolise the group of people with which it was associated, or "have a more elaborate ritual meaning" (Marangou & Grammenos 2005:14). In this regard, Hodder (2006) associates the bucrania at Çatalhöyük with feasting events, positing that they acted as mnemonics of important events and that they functioned as tangible objects symbolising the links between generations. Hayden

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<sup>10</sup>A bucranium is the skull of a bull, and can refer to the skulls and horn cores of real animals, or to heads modelled entirely from plaster with real horn cores.

(2003:465) also associates bucrania with feasting events, but understands them rather to be prestige displays.

Because of the vastly differing contexts in which bucrania have been found, it can be safely assumed that there wasn't a single function or reason for their appearance and use. The mistake in trying to ascribe such a function or reason is assuming that they had only a single meaning. A bucranium found in a burial may reflect the slaughter of an animal for a mortuary feast or as a sacrificial victim to accompany the deceased in the afterlife, and as such it would have a religious or ritual purpose. That same burial may be distinguished from other burials at the same site by possessing richer and more elaborate grave goods. This would be a mark of social stratification, and the inclusion of the bucranium would denote the burial of the social elite. Linked to this is the notion that wealth of the community may have been attached to the cattle which it kept. The bucranium would reflect this wealth, and would reveal the economic role of cattle. Each site or geographic area should therefore be studied more closely in order to ascertain the possible meanings or functions of the bucrania specific to the location.

## 2. ANATOLIA

### 2.1 Çatalhöyük

Çatalhöyük, a Neolithic settlement situated on the Konya Plain in south-central Anatolia, was excavated by James Mellaart between 1961 and 1965CE. The site is both impressive in its size<sup>11</sup> and unique in the decoration of its structures [Figure 1]. The most elaborate decoration dates to the seventh millennium, and includes wall paintings, modelled reliefs, and bucrania [Figure 2].

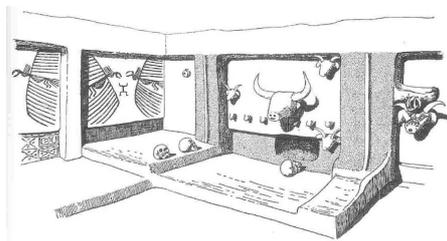


Figure 1: reconstruction of a 'shrine' at Çatalhöyük.

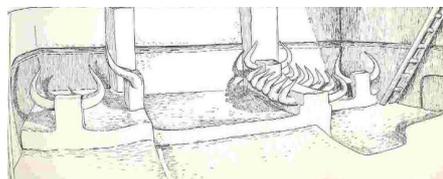


Figure 2: Reconstruction of a room at Çatalhöyük.

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<sup>11</sup>It is one of a small number of large Neolithic sites in the ancient Near East. It consists of two adjacent mounds. The east mound is about 13 ha and the west mound is about 8 ha.

When compared to bucrania from earlier sites, the Çatalhöyük bucrania are more elaborate<sup>12</sup>. Prior to installation, the bucrania were often reduced to frontlets<sup>13</sup> and then covered with clay and painted (Twiss 2006:5). Generally, the bucrania were placed on the western walls of the dwellings (Hodder & Cessford 2004:22), and on low benches in groups of three, five or seven [Figure 3]. They were also sunk within pillars [Figure 4], used as reliefs, and placed in pits, trenches and burials, as well as on the floor (Twiss 2006:5). Some bucrania may also have been placed on roofs (Hodder 2006:169).

The degree of decoration differed between buildings. Mellaart, the site's original excavator, believed the most elaborate buildings to be shrines and Çatalhöyük to be a religious centre (Mellaart 1962:51). The bucrania would have served as ritual deposits in these shrines. However, as Mellaart (1963:52) himself noted, there were no traces of sacrifice, nor of any provisions for sacrifice<sup>14</sup>, in any of the buildings, including those which he designated as shrines. Furthermore, the concept of the shrine suggests a separation between religious and domestic spaces. All buildings show signs of habitation, such as activity around the hearth, and most, if not all, buildings had some kind of decoration. The concept of the shrine, therefore does not seem to apply to any specific structure at Çatalhöyük (Düring 2001:10). In fact, no evidence of public buildings has been found at the site. Despite the lack of public buildings, the fact that the decoration and structure of these structures were so uniform across the site demonstrates that there was a homogenous culture at Çatalhöyük (Hodder 2006:135).

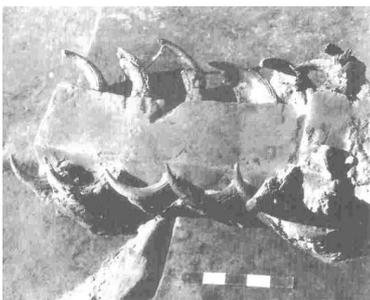


Figure 3: Bucrania set in a bench



Figure 4: Bucrania set in a pillar.

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<sup>12</sup>This does not, however, presuppose any continuity or interconnection between the cultures.

<sup>13</sup>A 'frontlet' is the horns of the animal with the intervening portion of the frontal bone.

<sup>14</sup>Such as drains or sinks to collect blood or libations.

The meaning or symbolism of the bucrania at Çatalhöyük has also been much debated. Mellaart (1965:97) thought that the bull imagery was the focus of a bull cult. Gimbutas (2001:35) noted that a bucranium resembles the human female uterus and fallopian tubes, and posited a connection between a Mother Goddess and the bull skulls. The similarity is most likely merely coincidental, because fallopian tubes are barely visible to the naked eye and, as Thornton (1999:86) points out, it is hard to believe that “the same peoples who did not connect men’s ejaculation with conception could nonetheless figure out the role in reproduction of the tiny fallopian tubes<sup>15</sup>.” If the bull imagery at Çatalhöyük does represent a deity, this divinity would more realistically be male. The bull was a symbol of male virility and strength, and the bull’s horn is thought to have been a phallic symbol (Gardner, Kleiner & Mamiya 2004:12).

Ian Hodder (2006), the current Director of the Çatalhöyük Archaeological Project, has argued against bucrania representing any kind of divinity. He contends that the bucrania placed in the houses were associated with feasting events. Some of the feasting appears to be associated with the foundation and abandonment of dwellings. The heads of the animals which were feasted upon were kept in the houses and may have been passed down from generation to generation. In this way they functioned as mnemonics of these significant events. Historical connections within ancestral groups would have thus been created. Human skulls were similarly passed down, and used in the same way. Because the bucrania symbolised the ancestral and familial links, and because they were built into the houses, they can be seen as “literally holding it up” (Hodder 2002:180). Hayden (2003:465) also links the bucrania with feasting, but identifies them rather as “prestige displays of feasting”.

The pillars into which bucrania were sunk may point to a different function or symbolism for these bucrania. Mellaart (1962:57) originally identified these as “portable altars”, but later (1963:52) changed his view. Because these pillars were placed in front of the platforms which served as beds, and under which the ancestors were buried, he believed that the bucrania were meant to ward off evil spirits. The bull, symbol of power and might, was therefore meant to

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<sup>15</sup>Although it seems likely the Neolithic people knew and understood the role of ejaculation in conception, the basic premise of this quote is sound; it is unlikely that the people of Çatalhöyük would have known the function of the fallopian tubes.

protect the inhabitants of the dwelling, both living and deceased<sup>16</sup>. Because the bull was a symbol of fertility and life, and because these pillars were placed alongside the bed, the bucrania could also have had the function of blessing the couple with fertility.

## **2.2 Hallan Çemi**

Although the most famous bucrania, those from Çatalhöyük are not the earliest. Cattle skulls which predate the site have been found across the ancient Near East. Hallan Çemi, in the foothills of the Taurus Mountains of modern-day southeast Turkey, has been dated to the end of the ninth millennium. A semi-subterranean structure at the site, which appears to have been public in nature (Nelson 1998:56), contained a complete aurochs skull on the north wall, facing the entrance (Banning 2003:19). These were the only aurochs remains found at the site (Nelson 1998:56). Because of its prominent display, Marangou and Grammenos (2005:14) suggest that the bucranium symbolised the group which used the structure, or that it had a more elaborate ritual meaning. It is also possible that the bucranium served as a fetish<sup>17</sup>.

## **2.3 Çayönü Tepesi**

The “Skull Building” at Çayönü Tepesi in modern-day southeast Turkey is so called because it contained more than 90 human skulls and complete and partial skeletons. The building was in use during the period 7400-6800 and appears to have undergone at least two reconstructions. During the first phase, the crudely built structure contained skulls on the floor and a deep pit contained human skeletons and cattle bones (Kuijt 2000:200). The Later Skull Building underwent several building phases. During the final phase of construction, it consisted of a main room with a large, polished stone slab, and three smaller chambers at the northern end of the building which contained the skeletal remains. There was a depression in the floor which contained cattle bones [figure 5](Croucher 2005:614), and a bucranium hung of the wall facing the courtyard (Marangou & Grammenos 2005:12). In 1985 CE blood residue tests were conducted on a piece of the slab from the main room which revealed that both human and

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<sup>16</sup>It is worth noting that, according to Karageorghis (1971:263), still today, bucrania are hung above the doors of houses in Cyprus and elsewhere in the Near East to protect the inhabitants against the evil eye.

<sup>17</sup>A fetish is an object which is believed to have supernatural powers.

aurochs blood were present<sup>18</sup>. In 1986 CE a large, black flint knife was excavated at the site and was found to contain blood residues of both humans and aurochs (Loy & Wood 1989:451-457).



Figure 5: Bucrania and cattle bones *in situ* in the Skull Building.

Although the precise function of Çayönü Tepesi's Skull Building remains unclear, it is unlikely that it was used to simply store the skulls and bucrania. The skulls were deposited into the Skull Building at different times, and no single event produced them (Croucher:2005:616). According to Nakhai (2003:103), this building was probably the ancestral hall of the community, while Loy and Wood (1989:451) favour "some yet-unknown ritual/mortuary function", and Schirmer (1990:382) proposes "some death cult, whatever its specific nature". Some of the human skeletons display incisions and signs of defleshing, suggesting the head was severed from the body (Croucher 2005:614). This may be linked to the slab in the southern area of the Skull Building on which the blood residue was found. It is possible, but not certain, that human and animal sacrifice were practised in the room. It has also been suggested that surgical procedures were performed on the slab (Kuijt 2000:200) and that bodies were prepared for secondary burial there (Croucher 2005:616). While either of these interpretations could account for the human remains, they do not seem to apply to the cattle remains. According to Akkermans and Schwartz (2003:75) the evidence points to the cattle having been slaughtered in mortuary or funerary rites. Nakhai (2003:105) has suggested that the skeletal remains were associated with ancestor veneration, and, as at Çatalhöyük, that they created ancestral links within the group.

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<sup>18</sup>For a discussion on the criticisms of the blood residue analysis, see Kaiser 1995.

## 2.4 Alaçahöyük

Alaçahöyük provides a rare example of the use of bucrania from the historic period. An Early Bronze Age cemetery, dated circa 2500-2200, was excavated at the site. The tombs were shallow rectangular pits which were covered by a roof of logs or wooden beams. Paired bucrania rested on top of some of the burials [figure 6]. Aruz and Wallenfels (2003:277) suggest that these were the remains of animal sacrifices. Sagona and Zimansky (2009:216) more specifically believe that they “represent the remains of a ceremonial funerary feast.” These burials which contained other grave goods such as jewellery and decorative objects made, of precious materials, and standards of stags and bulls<sup>19</sup>, represent the burials of the elite (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:278).

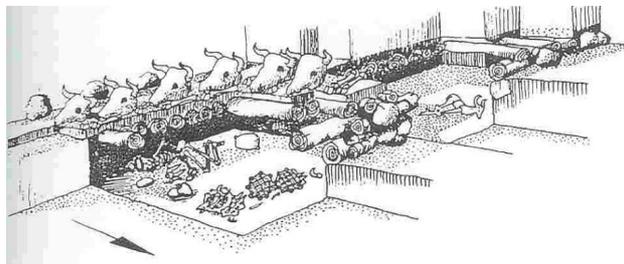


Figure 6: Reconstruction of a tomb at Alaçahöyük.

The bucrania from Anatolia generally had social and religious or ritual functions. At Çatalhöyük, the bucrania built within the walls of the buildings may have been meant to protect the inhabitants of the dwelling, and those placed beside the bed may have been meant to bless these people with fertility. The bucrania also functioned as mnemonics of important social events, providing social ties amongst the community as well as with the ancestors. The bucrania at Hallan Çemi most likely symbolised the community, and therefore also served a social function. At Çayönü Tepesi's Skull Building the bucrania were associated with human skeletons and had some mortuary function. As such, they would have had some ritual or religious significance. Because they are so clearly associated with the human skeletons, they must have been of some importance to the community, and can be seen as having some social significance above their more obvious ritual aspect. Because the Early Bronze Age bucrania from Alaçahöyük are

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<sup>19</sup>The bull standards of Alaçahöyük are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*.

associated with burials, they clearly had some ritual significance. The bulls which provided the skulls were perhaps sacrifices in funerary rites or the remains of a funerary feast. The bucrania were only found in the burials of the social elite, and they are also therefore indicators of social stratifications, and as such they served a social function.

### 3. THE AFRICAN CONNECTION

#### 3.1 Nubia

##### 3.1.1 *Neolithic Sites in Sudan/Nubia*

The earliest recorded burials in the Nile Valley were excavated at Tushka, a late Paleolithic Qadan site north of Abu Simbel in Nubia<sup>20</sup>, and have been dated to the thirteenth millennium. In Cemetery 8905, human burials were found surmounted with bucrania, while a number of cattle graves were found nearby (Midant-Reynes 2000:89; Rice 2003a:23). The site has a clear ritual significance, revealing a special relationship between the people buried at the site and the wild cattle. Rice (2003b:44) suggests that the bucrania were meant to offer protection to the deceased.

This early ritual treatment of cattle at Tushka appears to be unique<sup>21</sup>. Similar activity occurs again in Africa only eight thousand years later during the fifth millennium, when complete and separate cattle burials are known from the Lower Nile and Western Desert and bucrania were placed in human graves at sites in the Middle Nile<sup>22</sup>(Edwards 2004:53). The bucrania were not only placed in the burials, but were also used to mark the approaches to elite burials (McInerny 2010:37).

Burials containing bucrania have been found at the Neolithic site of El-Ghaba in central Sudan. These bucrania were cut, leaving the horns and the upper cranium (Midant-Reynes 2000:135).

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<sup>20</sup>Although it is customary to discuss Egyptian examples before Nubian examples, the Nubian examples will be discussed first because they appear first chronologically, and provide a backdrop to the Egyptian artefacts.

<sup>21</sup>Although, according to Gordon and Schwabe (2004:36), some shallow human burials on the east bank of the Nile north of Wadi Halfa which were covered by stone slabs may have been surmounted by aurochs horns. These burials were of the late Paleolithic Qadan culture and date to 12 000-10 000.

<sup>22</sup>Evidence is restricted to the central Sudan and the Dongola Reach, the stretch of the Nile from the Third Cataract south to the bend in the river, as significant burial sites have not been located elsewhere.

The graves at El-Ghaba can be divided into two groups: those which contained bucrania were located in the north, while those which contained flat-bottomed and chalice-like vessels were in the south. Midant-Reynes (2000:135) notes that the differing grave goods imply differing funerary rites. Wengrow (2006:59), however, describes one burial which contained two superimposed bucrania, placed next to the head of the deceased, as well as three vessels. The difference in grave goods could therefore imply a difference in social standing, rather than in belief.

Similar bucrania which had been reduced to frontlets were found in burials at el-Kadada in northern Sudan (Midant-Reynes 2000:135).

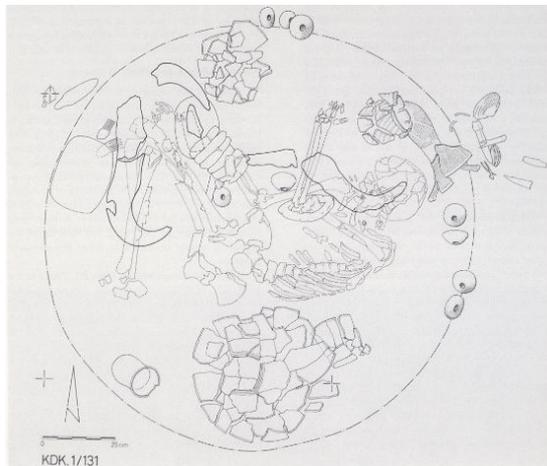


Figure 7: Burial with bucrania at Kadruka.

Cemetery KDK1 at the site of Kadruka on the Dongola Reach contains burials dating to around 4000. The 97 burials seem to have developed around the most elaborate burial, that of a mature male, which contained a variety of grave goods. Cattle hides which had been tinted with a yellow pigment covered his body, while two bucrania, coated in a white substance, were placed on top of his body [figure 7] (Wengrow 2006:59). Surrounding this burial, near the top of the mound, were the male burials. Females were buried below (Edwards 2004:56). An adult female was buried with a bucranium placed over her knees. The skull had been reduced to a frontlet (Wengrow 2006:59). It is worth noting that the bucrania were not restricted to male burials.

A cemetery containing burials of 250 to 300 individuals was excavated at Site R12 in the Dongola Reach. Grave goods included bucrania, which were typically found lying close to or upon the heads of those interred (Wengrow 2006:57-58).

### 3.1.2 *Nubia during the Egyptian Dynastic Period*

#### 3.1.2.1 Kerma

Kerma is a site in Upper Nubia on the east bank of the Nile near the Third Cataract. From the Egyptian Old Kingdom until the Second Intermediate Period, it was almost certainly the capital of the kingdom of Kush, the major trading partner to the south, and sometime adversary, of Egypt (Wilkinson 2005:124).

From the Late Neolithic pre-Kerma Period, social stratification is increasingly displayed through the wealth of grave goods in the burials at the necropolis of Kerma<sup>23</sup>. Cattle remains and bucrania have been found in association with the richer burials. Many of the elite of the Late Kerma Period were interred in enormous tombs which had large numbers of bucrania arranged around their south side (Edwards 2004:91). One of these burials contained nearly 1 400 bucrania (Bianchi 2004:85). This suggests that wealth in cattle was significant to Kerma's social elite (Mitchell 2005:75).

There was a development over time in the treatment of the bucrania at Kerma. The Early Kerma bucrania included their nasal bones, but the Middle Kerma bucrania were buried with the lower part of the skull cut in half. By the Late Kerma Period only the horns and the top of the skull were present (Castillos 2003:119).

The large amount of bucrania found in association with the burials suggests a massive slaughter of cattle for mortuary rites (Edwards 2004:91). According to Bray (2003:49), these bucrania indicate "large funerary feasts conducted before the burial of Kerma kings and elite." While the connection between the bucrania and burial rites is irrefutable, the fact that the skulls were buried facing the deceased human (Castillos 2003:119) suggests the cattle continued to have meaning

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<sup>23</sup>The necropolis of Kerma is famous for providing evidence of human sacrifice during the Late Kerma Period, when the bodies of up to 400 human sacrifices were found in the great 'royal' Tumuli (Edwards 2004:84).

after the feast, and after the burial of the deceased. It seems plausible that they were meant to protect or accompany the deceased in the afterlife.

### 3.1.2.2 C-Group and Pan Grave Cultures

Bucrania have also been found in relation to burials in Nubian C-Group graves (Gordon & Schwabe 2004:35). The burials with bucrania seem to appear only in later periods (Edwards 2004:89). Grigson (1991:139) notes that C-Group people greatly valued the ownership of cattle, citing the fact that their paintings on rock outcrops, grave stelae and pottery consisted largely of depictions of cattle for almost a thousand years.

When Petrie excavated Diospolis Parva, a collection of sites on the west bank of the Nile north of Denderah, he found bucrania dating to the Twelfth Dynasty [figure 8]. At some sites over a hundred skulls were found. The bucrania were painted with blocks, bands and spots of red, white and black [Figure 9] (Fowler 1900:212).

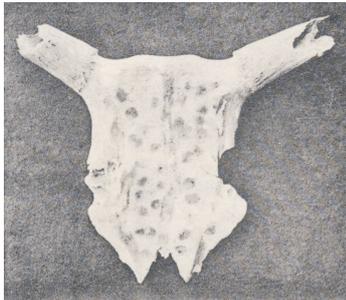


Figure 8: Bucranium from Diospolis Parva.



Figure 9: Bucranium from a Pan-grave burial.

These burials can be identified with the Pan-grave culture (Bard 1999: 449), named for the distinctive shallow pan-shaped graves of this culture. Pan-grave sites have been found throughout Upper Egypt and Lower Nubia, and share features with the Nubian C-Group and Kerma cultures<sup>24</sup>. Pan-grave people are generally identified with the Medjayu<sup>25</sup>, a nomadic group

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<sup>24</sup>Furthermore, the Middle Kerma Period corresponds to the Eleventh to Thirteenth Dynasties of Egypt, the same period as the Pan-graves excavated by Petrie at Diospolis parva.

<sup>25</sup>For a discussion on the identification of the Pan-Grave people with the Medjayu, see Trigger 1983:170-171.

which served in the Egyptian army and desert police force from the late Old Kingdom (Wilkinson 2005:147; 183).

That the skulls were cut at the back was understood by Fowler (1899:512-513) to mean that these bucrania were to be affixed to a wall. However, the fact that they were found in graves, as well as the mortuary context of the bucrania associated with other Nubian cultures, points rather to these bucrania having served as grave goods.

## **3.2 Egypt**

### *3.2.1 Predynastic Egypt*

The Neolithic farming community of Merimda, on the southwestern edge of the Nile Delta, is one of the earliest known predynastic settlements, occupied from circa 5000 to 4100 (Wenke 2009:177). The head of a bull was found at this site, modelled from Nile mud. It was not described or illustrated in the original report, which makes it uncertain whether this object was modelled on an actual skull, or if it was completely modelled from the clay (Baumgartel 1965:508). Hayes (1964:241) suggests that this bull's head had some sort of religious significance, possibly being the focus of "a fetishistic animal cult."

During the Badarian and Naqada periods bulls were buried with their horns protruding from the ground (Gordon & Schwabe 2004:33). Cattle were buried, wrapped in linen or matting, in some Badarian burial sites (Gordon & Schwabe 2004:33). At el-Badari, the type site for which the Badarian Period was named, a large bovid was buried in a separate oval pit, and covered in matting. Wengrow (2006:56) notes that this treatment is the same as in human burials. Unlike other cattle burials at the site, the skull of this animal was missing. A predynastic elite cemetery with elephant and cattle burials has been excavated at Hierakonpolis (Wilkinson 2005:104).

Excavations at Hierakonpolis produced an artefact which demonstrates how at least some bucrania were used. A carved tusk was found at the site which showed the long facade of a building with bucrania hung over the door [figure 10] (Quibell, Green & Petrie 2009:37). Whitehouse (2004:1125) notes that these heads could also represent rams' skulls or those of a Barbary goat.

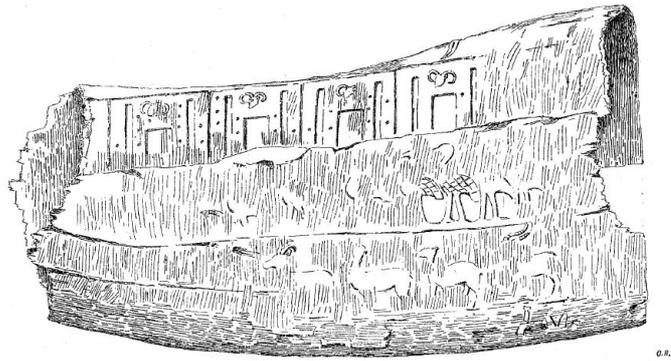


Figure10: Hierakonpolis carved tusk.

### 3.2.2 *First Dynasty*

#### 3.2.2.1 Minor Objects

A seal impression dating to the reign of Narmer, the first pharaoh of the First Dynasty, was found in Grave 414 at Tarkhan, located on the west bank of the Nile about 50km south of modern-day Cairo. The seal impression bears a depiction of a building facade surmounted by a bull's head and surrounded by crocodiles [figure 11]. Petrie, Wainwright and Gardiner (1913:21) identify the seal which made this impression as the “seal of the Fayum province”. They further recognise the bull's head as a bucranium. Wilkinson (1999:295) believes the building facade to represent a shrine dedicated to the crocodile god Sobek<sup>26</sup>.

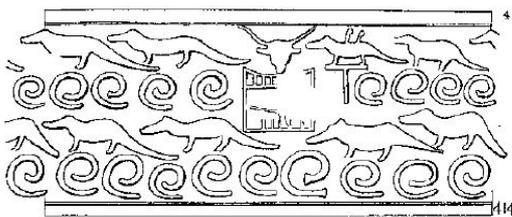


Figure 11:Tarkhan seal impression.

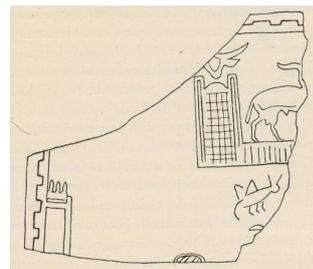


Figure 12: Abydos label fragment.

A similar depiction is found on a fragmentary label from the reign of Den, the fifth pharaoh of the first Dynasty, which was found at Abydos in northern Upper Egypt [figure 12]. The label

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<sup>26</sup>For a different interpretation of the iconography of this piece, see *Chapter 4: The Bull and the King*.

depicts a shrine with mudbrick walls inside a settlement with crenellated walls (Lauer 1948:6). The head of a bovid is clearly visible surmounting the remaining wall of the shrine.

It is uncertain what type of building is depicted on the Hierakonpolis carved tusk, but only a building of great importance would have been depicted with the extent of decoration it displays. When the Tarkhan seal impression and Abydos label are considered, it is likely that the building on the carved tusk also depicts a shrine. These three pieces point to a common Pre- and Early Dynastic tradition in which bucrania were used to decorate or mark shrines. It is possible that the missing skull from the cattle burial at el-Badari was purposefully removed and functioned as an architectural decoration as demonstrated on these pieces.

### 3.2.2.2 Saqqara

Bucrania were used to decorate mastabas<sup>27</sup> at the First Dynasty necropolis at Saqqara. Wengrow (2006:242) suggests that the killing and consumption of the cattle which provided the bucrania or horn cores for these tombs formed part of the rituals and ceremonies surrounding the building of the tomb.

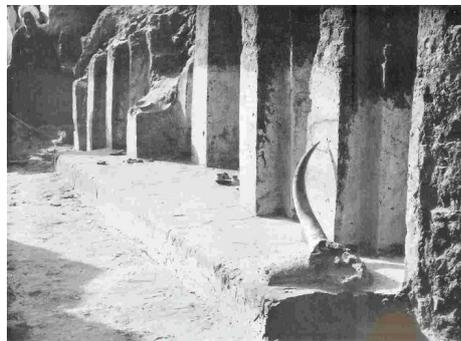


Figure 13: Bucranium on the east facade of Tomb 3507

Tomb 3507 belonged to Queen Herneith, the wife of Djer, the third king of the First Dynasty. Moulded bulls' heads with real horns were found on a low bench surrounding her tomb [figure 13] (Rice 1998:128). Horn fragments were found outside Tomb 3506 (Wengrow 2006:241),

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<sup>27</sup>A mastaba is a type of ancient Egyptian mudbrick or stone tomb which was rectangular in shape, with a flat roof and sides which tapered slightly inward. The name derives from the Arabic word for 'bench', referring to the shape of the structure.

suggesting that bucrania had once surrounded this tomb.

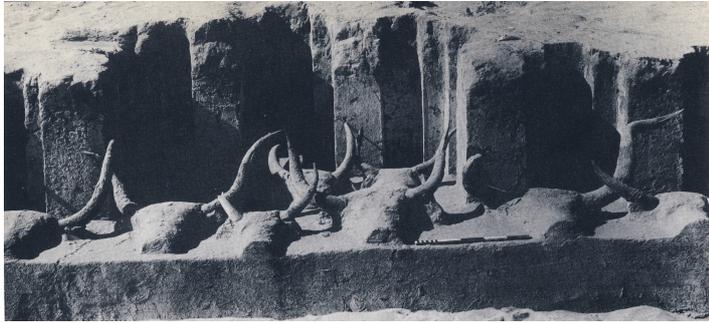


Figure 14: Bucrania on the platform surrounding Tomb 3504.

The most elaborate decoration belonged to Tomb 3504. This mastaba dates to the time of the pharaoh Djed, and because of its grandeur, it was originally thought to belong to this king<sup>28</sup> (Lauer 1976:88). It was, however, most likely built for Sekhem-Ka, Royal Treasurer during the reign of Djed (Rice 1999:177). A raised platform surrounded the mastaba, upon which as many as three hundred bulls' heads, modelled from clay and with large natural horns, were mounted [figure 14]. The mastaba was surrounded by an enclosure wall, meaning that this "herd" could only be viewed from close proximity (Wengrow 2006:242). This suggests the viewing of these bucrania would have been a more intimate experience, and one which would have had a profound effect on the viewer. According to Lauer (1976:88), who excavated at Saqqara with James Quibell and Cecil Firth, the bucrania were either "a symbolic offering or a magic protection".

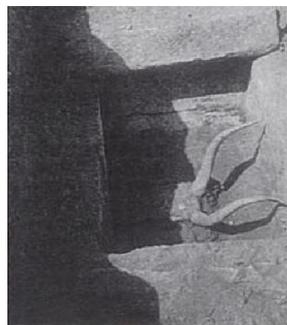


Figure 15: Bucranium beneath altar the in the South Court Complex at Saqqara.

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<sup>28</sup>This tomb has also been misidentified as belonging to Djed. See for example, Rykwert 1996:491.

Also at Saqqara, the skull of a decapitated aurochs was found buried beneath an altar close to the base of Djoser's Step Pyramid in the South Court Complex<sup>29</sup> [figure 15]. A concealed stone-lined chamber was built under the steps of the altar and housed the bucranium (Rice 1998:129-130; Rice 2003a:164). Some kind of ritual would have been conducted upon the altar, and this ritual would therefore have been conducted above the bull skull. It seems unlikely that this would be a coincidence.

The Nubian bucrania were all found in a mortuary context. Surmounting graves, such as at Tushka, or placed inside the burials with other grave goods, such as at El-Ghaba and Kadruka, they reveal a belief in the afterlife and illuminate certain aspects of the religions of the people concerned. At El-Ghaba the differences in grave goods points to social differentiation. Similarly, bucrania were only found in the richer burials at both Kadruka and Kerma. Bucrania in graves are therefore a sign of the social elite at these sites. Wealth in cattle appears to have been significant to the elite at Kerma, and cattle therefore played a part in the economy of the kingdom.

In Egypt bucrania were used differently than to from Nubia. The bucranium from Merimda functioned as a fetish, and was therefore a part of the cult. The carved tusk from Hierakonpolis, the seal impression from Tarkhan and the label fragment from Abydos all reveal that bucrania were used to decorate shrines. These three artefacts as well as the bucranium buried beneath the altar in the South Court Complex at the base of Djoser's Step Pyramid demonstrate that bucranium were used in the cult of ancient Egypt. At Saqqara bucrania were also used to decorate the tombs of the social elite, and in this context they had both a religious and a social role, much like in Nubia.

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<sup>29</sup>The South Court symbolically recalled the large area in which the pharaoh celebrated the *sed* festival, and was intended for the continued re-enactment of this ritual in the afterlife. It is noteworthy then that while the king symbolically ran this course, he not only passed this altar and bucranium, but he was also traditionally accompanied by the Apis bull. While this could be merely coincidence, it is also potentially highly significance, and should not be discounted.

## 4. THE LEVANT

### 4.1 Mureybet

The earliest known bucrania from an architectural context<sup>30</sup> were excavated at Mureybet<sup>31</sup> in the Jordan Valley and date to the tenth millennium (Caubet & Pouyssegur 1998:21). The bucrania from Mureybet had a simple texture and quite a natural style when compared to the later examples which were covered in clay and sometimes decorated (Cauvin 2000:31).



Figure 18: Horn buried in a clay bench at Mureybet.

Some buildings contained horns, skulls and bones of wild bulls buried in clay benches or beneath the floor [figure 18] (Caubet & Pouyssegur 1998:21; Mithen 2003:64), or hanging from walls (Roux 1992:42). The oldest bucrania were buried inside the walls of the buildings and were therefore not visible to the occupants of the buildings. Cauvin (2000:125) suggests that this points to a symbolic function. Because of the association between the bull and strength, the bucrania would have been used to symbolically give the buildings this power, granting them a continuous resistance to all forms of destruction.

### 4.2 Jerf El-ahmar

Two structures at Jerf el-Ahmar<sup>32</sup>, a site on the Middle Euphrates, are notable because of their

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<sup>30</sup>Meaning that the bucrania were found either as part of a structure, or as decoration of a structure, as opposed to a mortuary context where they are found in association with a burial.

<sup>31</sup>It is interesting to note that, although bucrania were excavated at Mureybet, no bull figurines or depictions were found at the site (Mithen 2003:64).

<sup>32</sup>Jerf el-Ahmar is an important site because five objects - three tools and two flat stones - were found which had incised animals and patterns which may represent pictographs (Glassner 2003:88-9). These pieces date to the tenth millennium, predating the oldest known writings at Uruk by about six millennia.

architecture, and are considered to be public buildings (Mithen 2003:64). The first building was located in the centre of the village and seems to have been used by the community to store grain. The second building was small and circular, and was apparently deliberately burned down. This structure has been named the *Maison aux bucrânes* after the four bucrania which were found in it (Marangou & Grammenos 2005:12). These would have been hung upon the wall (Banning 2003:19). According to Marangou and Grammenos (2005:12), one of the bucrania may have been connected to a necklace of clay beads, recalling the later protective bulls head amulets known from across the ancient Near East<sup>33</sup>.

## 4.3 Cyprus

### 4.3.1 *Figurines*

Cyprus<sup>34</sup> has produced rare archaeological evidence for the purpose of bucrania. Two small clay figurines were found in the sanctuary of Ayia Irini, on the northwest coast of Cyprus, which represent human figures wearing bull's masks (Karageorghis 1971:262). Two more figures, which have been dated to 650-600, were found at the Temple of Apollo at Kourion [figure 19] (Rice 1998:240), while another was found at Amathus [figure 20] (Aupert 1997:23). These bull-masked figures are thought to represent priests. This interpretation is supported by a model of a sanctuary found at Vounous in northern Cyprus. This model contains three figures wearing bull masks facing the entrance of the shrine. A small figure kneels before them while other figures gather around. Bulls are kept in pens next to the entrance (Rice 1998:241-2). Because this piece has been identified as a model of a shrine, it follows that the figures wearing the bull masks would represent priests.

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<sup>33</sup>These bull head amulets are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 11: The Bull and Composite Bull Figures as Protective Beings*.

<sup>34</sup>Cyprus is an island located 122km west of the Syrian coast and 69km south of the Turkish coast. Much of the interaction between Cyprus and the rest of ancient Near East may be related to the Cypriot copper industry. Cyprus is generally identified with Alashiya, an important Middle and Late Bronze Age state which was a major supplier of copper.



Figure 19: Clay figures of men wearing bull masks from Kourion.



Figure 20: Clay figure of a man wearing a bull mask from Amathus.

#### 4.3.2 *Bucrania From Temples*

The evidence for the use of bucrania as masks comes not only from the figurines, but from the excavated bucrania themselves. Temple 5 at Kition was modified slightly in the twelfth century. Several bucrania were found on the floor of this second period structure [figure 21] (Nicolaou 1977:524). At the same site, about a dozen bucrania were found on the earliest floor of the Temple of Astarte dating to the eighth century. These bucrania were found near the offering table of the temple (Rice 1998:241). While this may suggest that they served as votive objects, they were however reduced to frontlets in order to be sewn onto cloth or leather in order to function as a mask during religious ceremonies (Karageorghis 1971:263).



Figure 21: Bucrania in situ on the floor of The Temple of Astarte at Kition.



Figure 22: Clay bull mask from Amathus.

Over a hundred bucrania were found in the twelfth century sanctuary in Quarter 5E in the southern part of Enkomi, near Famagusta (Carter 1987:372). Fifteen more bucrania were found in the Ashlar Building<sup>35</sup>, or Sanctuary of the Horned God<sup>36</sup> (Knapp 2008:279). These skulls functioned, as at Kition, as bull-masks (Karageorghis 1971:263). Numerous clay votive bull-masks, dating to the archaic period [figure 22], have also been found in Cyprus (Karageorghis 1971:262).

#### 4.3.3 *Models of Sanctuaries*

That not all bucrania were used as masks is proven by models of sanctuaries which show bucrania represented on wooden poles (Karageorghis 1971:261). One of these models, excavated at Vounous and dating to around 2000, shows bucrania mounted on pilasters on the wall of the shrine [figure 23]. Beneath the bucrania, a figure pours a libation into a large amphora (Rice 1998:243).



Figure 23: Model of a shrine from Vounous.



Figure 24: Cypro-Geometric Plaque.

A plaque with a relief decoration of a bull's head and a naked woman dating from the Cypro-

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<sup>35</sup>In addition to the fifteen bucrania, several bronze and terracotta bull figurines, and two ox horns, possibly forming a bull's head rhyton, were discovered in this structure (Knapp 2008:279).

<sup>36</sup>This shrine is called the 'Sanctuary of the Horned God' because cult statues representing a god wearing a helmet with horns were found at the site. Karageorghis (1971:263) identifies this deity as a bull-god, but when considering the fact that horned-headresses were a mark of divinity across the ancient Near East, there is no reason to identify this deity as a bull god.

Geometric Period, circa 11<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> century [figure 24] may recall the sanctuary models. The woman holds what appears to be a basket, perhaps with an offering, while the bull's head is above her. Above the bull are two holes for suspension.

A similar plaque, dating to the 13<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century, was found at Megiddo in northern Israel's Jezreel Valley [figure 25]. The forepart of a bull, the head and forelegs, projects from the plaque, just beneath a hole for suspension. Jirku (1959:260) believes this piece had some religious significance. Both these plaques had a projection at the bottom which could have served as catchments for libations.



Figure 25: Megiddo plaque.



Figure 26: Terracotta model of a shrine from Tell al-Farar.

A terracotta model of a shrine dating from the tenth century was found at Tell al-Farar [figure 26]. The facade of this shrine has an opening flanked by two fluted pillars. The capitals of these pillars curve inwards in spirals, and are reminiscent of bull horns. When the depictions of horned temples from Susa are considered, this hypothesis does not seem unreasonable.

#### 4.4 Nahal Mishmar

The "Cave of Treasure" at Nahal Mishmar, a seasonal stream in the Judean Desert, yielded a hoard of 429 pieces, 416 of which were made of copper (Ussishkin 1971:35). The hoard is associated with the Ghassulian culture, and has been dated to the second quarter of the fourth millennium (Moorey 1988:173). It seems likely that the hoard formed the cultic equipment of the temple at Ein Gedi which, for some reason, was hidden at Nahal Mishmar (Ussishkin 1971).



Figure 27: Crown 7 from Nahal Mishmar.

The copper objects included maceheads, standards and ten pieces which, for lack of a better word, have been called crowns. These crowns are high-sided circular objects with concave walls which differ in size and ornamentation. Most are plain or simply decorated, but three are more elaborate. One of these has a human face, while another has two horned animals peering over the top. The third crown, Crown 7 [figure 27], is the most elaborately decorated. It has a rectangular opening in the side, opposite which, on the rim, are two birds. Two ladder-like projections are set on the rim, on opposite sides, as if they flank the opening. These projections each contain eight knobs and are surmounted by a pair of horns.

The precise function of the crowns is uncertain, but it seems likely that they had some ritual purpose. Levy (1986:89) proposes that they symbolise “positions of social or ritual status,” while Tubb (1998:32) suggests that the crowns and standards fitted together to form altars. It seems most likely, however, that the crowns represent circular structures<sup>37</sup> (Ziffer 2007:48). The features set on the rim would have been set within the walls of the structures. Some of the simpler crowns may represent the enclosures in which bodies were exposed prior to the burial of the disarticulated bones, while the crown with the two horned animals could represent a cattle byre (Moorey 1988:179). Crown 7 had the most elaborate decoration, and would therefore have represented the most elaborate building. This would either have been a temple, or the palace of the community. Ziffer (2007:54-5) proposes that this crown represented the palace, and that it

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<sup>37</sup>It is worth noting that, although they date from different time periods, certain of the structures containing bucrania which are discussed above, such as those from Mureybet and Jerf el-Ahmar, were circular.

served to display elite or royal power to the community. According to his theory, it would have been carried in processions or been on public display, and may have served in royal rituals, such as the renewal of kingship. While this theory may be true, all other extant examples of architectural models with bucrania have been interpreted to represent temples.

In Cyprus the evidence is overwhelming that bucrania were used as masks in religious rituals. The models of sanctuaries provide artefactual evidence that bucrania were also used to decorate shrines or temples on both Cyprus and on the Levantine mainland. One of the bucrania from Jerf el-Ahmar was attached to a necklace, suggesting that it had some symbolic function. It may have served to symbolise the group with which it was associated, or it could have afforded this group protection. Because the bucrania were built into the walls of buildings at Mureybet, they would have been meant to offer strength to the building and therefore had a protective function.

## 5. MESOPOTAMIA

### 5.1 Horned Temples

There is little evidence for the use of bucrania in Mesopotamia. The impression of a cylinder seal from Susa in Elam, dating to the Susa II Period, circa 3800-3100, has been reconstructed from two bullae fragments to reveal a priest king shooting arrows at enemies in front of a temple [figure 16]. Three sets of horns decorate the facade of this temple (Algaze 2005: 15).



Figure 16: Elamite cylinder seal impression.

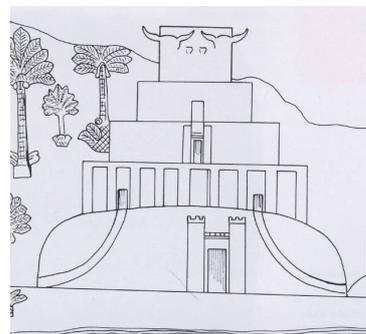


Figure 17: Relief from Nineveh.

A depiction of a horned temple is also found on a relief depicting an Elamite city from the palace of Ashurbanipal from Nineveh<sup>38</sup> [figure 17]. According to Oates (2003:119), the ziggurat at Susa had horns of burnished bronze, but it is uncertain which city this scene depicts.

## 5.2 The Horns of the Bull of Heaven

The use of bucrania occurs predominantly during the Prehistoric Period. Because writing had not been invented at this time, there are no written records detailing the use and function of bucrania. One possible exception is in the story of Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven, told in both the Sumerian poem *Bilgames and the Bull of Heaven: 'Hero in battle'* and in tablet VI of the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

In the earlier Sumerian poem, after Gilgamesh, whose name appears here as Biglames, and his companion Enkidu have defeated the Bull of Heaven, the parts of the Bull of Heaven are distributed throughout Uruk, and “from flasks made of its horns Inanna in Eanna did pour sweet oil” (George 2003:175).

In the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh* the horns of the Bull of Heaven meet a different, but similar fate:

“Gilgamesh summoned all the smiths and the craftsmen,  
the size of the horns the craftsmen admired.  
Thirty minas of lapis lazuli in a solid block,  
two minas each their rims,  
six kor of oil, the capacity of both.  
He gave them to his god Lugalbanda, to hold oil for anointment,  
he took them in to hang in his chamber”

(George 2003:53).

In both accounts the horns are precious objects dedicated to a divinity, and in the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the horns are hung in the chamber of the god Lugalbanda. Although this only describes the use of the horns, and not of the entire skull, or even the frontlet, it points to the fact

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<sup>38</sup>The evidence we have for this relief is a drawing by the 19<sup>th</sup> century CE artist, William Boucher. Unfortunately the original slab was lost in 1854 when bandits sank the raft carrying this and a large number of other Assyrian sculptures.

that the horns of the animal were seen as precious, and worthy of being dedicated to a god, and, while the Bull of Heaven was an exceptional and supernatural creature, it follows that the horns of real bulls would also have been thus dedicated.

The use of bucrania in Mesopotamia is associated with religion. Both the seal impression from Susa and the relief from Nineveh show that horns were used to decorate temples. In the story of Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven, the horns of the Bull of Heaven were dedicated to divinities.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

It is clear that any single purpose, or any single meaning can not be ascribed to all the above examples of bucrania. The bucrania from the tombs at Alaçahöyük date to about four millennia after the other known bucrania from Anatolia, and seem both at odds and in line with these. They were found in an Early Bronze Age Cemetery, and are therefore related to mortuary practices. Similarly, the bucrania from the Skull Building at Çayönü Tepesi were placed with human skulls, and appear to have had some mortuary or ritual function. It is possible that they were associated with ancestor veneration, or that they were used to symbolise ancestral or family links. This is also a possibility for the function of the bucrania at Çatalhöyük. However, the treatment of the bucrania at the two sites is markedly different. Those at Çayönü Tepesi were found stored in what appears to be a public building, while those at Çatalhöyük, many of which were decorated, were displayed in private dwellings. This may point only to a difference in the practice of beliefs, and not to a difference in the beliefs themselves. Because the bucrania at Çatalhöyük were such an integral part of the architecture, it appears that they also served to symbolically hold the house together, and therefore to protect the inhabitants. The pillars with the bucrania sunk into them appear also to have served to protect the inhabitants as well as to offer them fertility. The bucranium at Hallan Çemi are unique amongst Anatolian bucrania because they were not found in association with other skeletal remains. This could be interpreted to mean that they served a different role. However, if this bucranium did act to symbolise the group of people which used the structure, this demonstrates an implicit symbolism of ancestral links, where those at Çatalhöyük and Çayönü were more explicit.

The bucrania from Egypt and Nubia are of a clearer context, and an attempt at explanation is therefore easier. Those from Nubia and from the majority of Egyptian sites were found in or associated with graves or tombs, and were therefore related to funerary or mortuary practices. What these practices were, however, is uncertain. They could represent sacrifices for symbolic offerings to accompany the deceased in the afterlife, or they could have afforded protection to the deceased in the afterlife. That the occupants of these burials had beliefs in the afterlife is made clear by the inclusion of grave goods in the burials. The bucrania may also represent cattle slaughtered for a mortuary feast. The decorated tusk from Hierakonpolis, the seal impression from Tarkhan and the label fragment from Abydos explicitly demonstrate that not all bucrania in Egypt served as grave goods, but that some were used to decorate buildings. It is possible that the bucrania which surrounded the First Dynasty mastabas represent the killing of cattle for rituals involved in the building of the tombs, and not in the funerary rituals. The bucranium found beneath the altar in the South Court Complex of Djoser's Step Pyramid has a clear religious significance and context, but, although it is located in a mortuary complex, it was not necessarily involved in mortuary rites.

The Levant provides the most diverse evidence for the use of bucrania. The earliest bucrania at Mureybet were built into the walls of buildings, and were therefore not visible. This suggests a more private and implicit symbolic purpose. It is possible that, as at Çatalhöyük, the bucrania were meant to symbolically give the building the power to protect its inhabitants. The bucrania at Jerf el-Ahmar were located in a public building, and therefore would have been symbolic to the community as a whole.

The evidence from Cyprus is unquestionable. Bucrania were certainly used as masks during religious rituals. What is not certain is exactly what these rituals entailed. The models of sanctuaries provide further evidence of a symbolic and ritual significance. Crown 7 from Nahal Mishmar most likely represented an architectural model of a shrine, and therefore provides further evidence of bucrania being used to decorate places of religious significance.

The evidence from Mesopotamia is slim, but it provides the clearest view. Bull horns are shown on seals and reliefs to have formed part of the temple architecture, and the horns of the Bull of

Heaven were dedicated to the divinities. Bull horns were therefore clearly of religious significance.

The bucrania from Çatalhöyük, the carved tusk, the seal impression and the label fragment from Pre- and Early Dynastic Egypt, the models of sanctuaries from Canaan and Cyprus, and the Elamite seal impression and the relief from Nineveh prove that bucrania were used to decorate buildings across the ancient Near East. Most of these buildings represent shrines or sanctuaries. The mastabas surrounded by bucrania at Saqqara served as mortuary complexes, and these bucrania may therefore have had a similar function as those which adorned shrines. The most elaborately decorated buildings at Çatalhöyük were originally thought to represent shrines, and, while this is no longer believed to be the case, the bucrania in these buildings clearly have some symbolic meaning. If the bucrania found at Merimda, Hallan Çemi and Jerf el-Ahmar represented a fetish, an insight into the purpose of bucrania is provided. The bull was a symbol of strength and fertility, and these are the qualities which the bull's head fetish would represent, and therefore the qualities which the people would have hoped would be imparted onto the buildings, the community and themselves. The strength of the bull was literally demonstrated in Mureybet and Çatalhöyük where the bucrania were built into the walls of buildings. The bull masks from Cyprus would have been used to give the power of the bull to the wearer, and therefore can also be seen as fetishistic. This approach may be able to account for the inclusion of bucrania in burials. Grave goods found in the Nubian burials suggest a belief in the afterlife. The objects included with burial are usually interpreted as being provided for extended use in the afterlife. The bucrania, however, may have been included to provide the deceased with protection.

It is clear then that, although the use of bucrania differed across the ancient Near East, their meaning was similar in all areas. Cattle were clearly important and significant to these people. They were held in a special regard, beyond mere animal husbandry. Cattle ownership appears to have been a mark of wealth and prestige in the Kerma burials, as well as in those from Early Dynastic Egypt and Early Bronze Age Alaçahöyük. This suggests that cattle played a part in the economy of these cultures. The animals were clearly elevated to a place of honour. In Egyptian burials they were even given the same treatment as humans. At Çatalhöyük they were so

intertwined with the daily lives of the people that an intimate relationship is impossible to deny. At Cyprus and in Mesopotamia they were held in such a high regard that they were associated with divinities. The use of bucrania is therefore a profound and intimate display of the complex relationship between man and beast.

## **CHAPTER 2: BULLS' HEADS**

*Decorative bulls' heads made of a variety of materials such as ivory, stone and precious metals have been found at sites in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and in Canaan. Examples will be studied to find differences and similarities in their use and function in various regions of the ancient Near East.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Decorative bulls' heads<sup>1</sup> have been found at sites across the ancient Near East, from Mesopotamia to Anatolia and Canaan. They all represent the same animal and therefore all have points of similarity, nevertheless they are not the same in form or function. Most date to the third millennium, but there are Assyrian and Urartian examples which date to the first millennium.

Decorative bulls' heads served a variety of functions, but most acted as attachments of some sort. The majority of third millennium bulls' heads appear to have decorated musical instruments or functioned as temple fittings, while later examples acted as furniture fittings. The bulls' heads themselves as well as the objects to which they were attached need to be studied in order to identify similarities and differences in their use in the different areas of the ancient Near East. This will help ascertain if any of the bulls' heads had any symbolic meaning or function other than decoration.

### **2. MESOPOTAMIA**

#### **2.1 Furniture Fittings**

During the Early Dynastic Period in Mesopotamia bulls' legs are shown on depictions of furniture (Simpson 1995:1648). The Standard of Ur, excavated from the Early Dynastic Royal Cemetery at Ur in southern modern-day Iraq, contains a depiction of a stool with bulls' legs on

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<sup>1</sup>'Decorative' in this case does not mean that the bulls' heads could not have had another function other than decoration.

the upper register its Peace Side<sup>2</sup> [figure 1]. While bulls' legs were used to decorate furniture, Aruz and Wallenfels (2003:83) hold that there is no evidence, either archaeological or iconographical, for bulls' heads, or any kind of animal head, being used as decorative parts of furniture during the third millennium. While there is no iconographical evidence to support animal heads being used to decorate furniture, decorative bulls' heads dating to this period have been found which have holes for attachments but it is uncertain to what they were attached<sup>3</sup>. It is possible that some of these functioned as furniture fittings.



Figure 1: The Standard of Ur (detail).



Figure 2: Bronze fitting from Nimrud.

Bulls' legs continued to decorate furniture until the Neo-Assyrian Period, when lions' heads and legs became the more common furniture decoration. The remains of a backless throne or stool were excavated in the North-West Palace of Nimrud in northern modern-day Iraq. While the wood of this piece of furniture had perished, various bronze fittings had survived, including bulls' heads which acted as finials on the arms [figure 2]. Other examples of bulls' heads furniture fittings survive in stone and ivory (Curtis & Reade 1995:124). Furniture with bulls' heads and bulls' legs is depicted on Assyrian reliefs. Ashurnasirpal II is shown sitting on a backless stool with bulls' head finials on a relief from Nimrud [figure 3] while tables with bulls' head finials and bulls' leg feet are shown in a relief from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh.

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<sup>2</sup>The two sides of the Standard of Ur are distinguished as the War Side and the Peace Side by their subject matter. Each side is divided into three registers. The War Side depicts a battle and its aftermath. The upper register of the Peace Side depicts a banquet scene and the middle and lower registers depict men leading animals and carrying fish and other goods, perhaps bringing them to the banquet.

<sup>3</sup>Discussed below.



Figure 3: Relief depicting a stool with bulls' head finials from Nimrud (detail).

## 2.2 Bulls' Heads from Sumerian Sites

### 2.2.1 *The Royal Cemetery at Ur*

A number of bull's head protomes were discovered in the Royal Cemetery at Ur. These bulls' heads were attached to the sound boxes of harps and lyres. The sound of these instruments was compared to a bull's lowing, which was considered a beautiful sound (De Schaunsee 2002:76). The sound box formed the abstract body of the bull, while the bulls' heads were rendered in a more realistic style. The shape of these instruments is confirmed by archaeological and iconographic evidence. When Leonard Woolley excavated the lyres, the wood had disintegrated. He poured plaster into the cavity left behind, which, when removed from the earth, revealed the shape of the instrument. In addition to this archaeological evidence, there are depictions of lyres with bull's heads, such as that on the upper register of the Peace Side of the Standard of Ur [figure 1].

The most ornate of the Royal Burials bulls' heads is from the Great Lyre [figure 4], found in the King's Grave. It was made of gold sheet over a wooden core and had eyes of shell and lapis lazuli. Lapis lazuli was also used for the tips of the horns<sup>4</sup>, the tufts on its forehead, and for the beard.

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<sup>4</sup>It is interesting, although probably coincidental, that the lapis lazuli tips to these horns recall the lapis lazuli horns of the Bull of Heaven from the Gilgamesh Epic.



Figure 4: Bull's head from the Great Lyre.



Figure 5: Bull's head from the Queen's Lyre.

The Queen's Lyre [figure 5], found in the tomb of Queen Puabi, is similar in appearance to the Great Lyre. The bull's head attached to this lyre is made of gold with eyes of lapis lazuli and shell. The hair and beard are also made of lapis lazuli. The horns of this have not survived to present times, but, because this and the bull's head from the Great Lyre are so similar, it is reasonable to suppose that they were made of gold with lapis lazuli tips. The noticeable difference between the two bulls' heads is that hair of the bull's head from the Great Lyre cuts straight across the forehead, while that of the Queen's Lyre curves slightly around the brow bone to form a point in the centre of the forehead.

The Golden Lyre is so called because the bull's head is made of gold with eyes made of inlaid mother-of-pearl and lapis lazuli [figure 6]. With its flowing beard, this bull's head is similar in appearance to those adorning the Great Lyre and the Queen's Lyre.



Figure 6: Bull's head from the Golden Lyre.



Figure 7: Bronze bull's head.

A fourth bull's head is made of bronze with eyes inlaid with shell and lapis lazuli [figure 7]. This bull's head has a row of curls on the top of its head, and a lapis lazuli triangular inlay on the forehead<sup>5</sup>. The lyre to which this bull's head was attached would have been "a much smaller version of the Great Lyre and was similar in size to the lyres shown carried by musicians in representations on relief plaques and on seals" (Zettler & Horne 1998:57). The smaller size of this piece, as well as the more modest materials from which it was made, suggest that the lyre was actually used in ancient times, whereas the more ornate Great Lyre may have been a cultic or votive object. The depiction of a lyre with a bull's head on the upper register of the Peace Side of the Standard of Ur supports the conclusion that at least some of the musical instruments from Ur were actually used while the deceased with which they were buried were alive. The lyre on the Standard of Ur is depicted in a banquet scene which according to Aruz and Wallenfels (2003:97) has "distinct religious overtones". This banquet scene probably represents a celebration of the victory of the battle shown on the War Side of the standard, and as such the gods would have been honoured. While this banquet scene therefore did have "religious overtones", it was not a religious feast.



Figure 8: Silver bull's head from Puabi's Tomb.



Figure 9: Silver bull's head from the Great Death Pit.

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<sup>5</sup>This and other triangular decorations on bulls' foreheads are discussed below.

A second lyre found in Puabi's tomb is made of silver and has eyes inlaid with lapis lazuli and shell [figure 8]. Zettler and Horne (1998:52) note that this bull's head was found near two shell plaques, but that "other shell plaques or fragments of plaques normally comprising the front of a lyre were not found in the immediate vicinity." The implication is that there is doubt over whether this bull's head decorated a musical instrument. When the other bull's heads from the Royal Burials are considered, this still seems the most likely function. The lack of plaques in the same context as the bull's head could point to the musical instrument to which this bull's head was attached being more minimally decorated. This would suggest that the musical instrument was used in ancient times. A second lyre with a silver bull's head was found in the Great Death Pit<sup>6</sup> at Ur [figure 9]. Because the decoration on the lyre from the Great Death Pit is also relatively simple, it is reasonable to assume that this lyre was played in ancient times. The two silver heads are quite similar, but where the hair of the silver bull's head from Puabi's tomb points downwards in a triangular shape on the bull's forehead, the hair of the bull's head from the Great Death Pit cuts straight across its forehead. This recalls the difference in the representation of the hair between the bull's head of the Great Lyre and that of the Queen's Lyre. It is unclear if the difference in the representation of the hair has any deeper meaning. Because the bulls' heads from the Great Lyre and Queen's Lyre are so similar in context and appearance they must represent the same tradition. That the hair of these two bulls' heads is different is therefore most likely due to the preference of the artist.

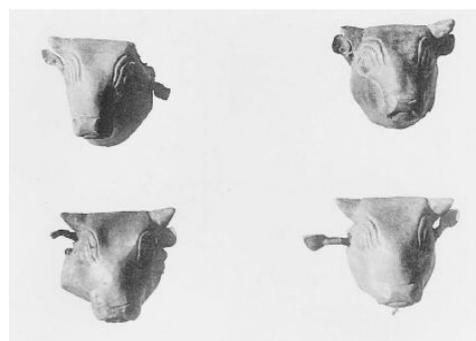


Figure 10: Bulls' heads from Puabi's sledge-chariot.

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<sup>6</sup>The Great Death Pit is a shaft which led down to a sunken courtyard located adjacent to Puabi's tomb which contained the bodies of 73 retainers.

The bulls' heads which decorated musical instruments are the most famous bulls' heads from the Royal Cemetery, but they are not the only ones. Small gold heads of bulls and lions decorated the top bar of Puabi's Sledge-Chariot [figure 10]. Although much smaller, the style of these bulls' heads is similar to that of the instrument protomes. Deep furrows are incised around the eyes. The horns are much smaller, but this can be explained by the function of these bulls' heads, and by the size of the bulls' heads. If the horns had been longer, they would have been rather flimsy due to their size, and would have broken off easily. If the sledge-chariot was actually used and was not merely a ritual or votive object, the horns of the bulls' head attachments would have stood an even higher risk of breaking.

### 2.2.2 *Khafajeh*

A copper bull's head found in the Sin Temple<sup>7</sup> at Khafajeh in central modern-day Iraq has been dated to the same period as those found at Ur, and is stylistically similar to the other Early Dynastic bulls' heads (Masson 1988:75). The eyes were inlaid with shell and lapis lazuli, and there was a triangular mother-of-pearl inlay on its forehead. The bull's head probably decorated a harp or lyre (Cook 1925:1102).

### 2.2.3 *Ubaid*

The Early Dynastic Temple of Ninhursag, the Sumerian Mother Goddess, in Ubaid in southern modern-day Iraq probably dates to the reign of A-anepada of the First Dynasty of Ur around 2500 (Leick 2002:1). The facade of this temple contained copper friezes depicting bulls which are now on display in the British Museum. The heads of the bulls were cast in the round and attached to the bodies which were moulded in relief. The bulls' heads are generally very corroded, and the details are therefore obscured. A crescent shape is still visible on the forehead of two bulls' heads [figure 11], and it is possible that at least some of the other bulls' heads also bore this crescent.

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<sup>7</sup>According to Masson (1988:75), the bull's head was discovered in the brick foundations of Sin Temple Level VIII, while according to Zettler and Horne (1998:177), it was discovered in Level IX.



Figure 11: Bull's head from the Temple of Ninhursag at Ubaid.

#### 2.2.4 *Mari*

A bull's head fitting from the Ishtar Temple in Mari in eastern modern-day Syria [figure 12] dates to the Early Dynastic Period. The entire piece was carved from a single piece of diorite. The eyes were inlaid with shell, and there is a triangular shell inlay on the forehead. The head and neck are divided from the rest of the stone which is shaped like a wedge. There is a hole through this wedge which "may have been used for a dowel that secured the sculpture to a wood support" (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:156).



Figure 12: Bull's head from the Ishtar Temple at Mari.

#### 2.2.5 *Bulls' Heads of Unknown Provenance*

Two Early Dynastic bulls' heads, one now housed in the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin [figure 13] and the other now housed in the Louvre in Paris [figure 14], are almost identical. The bull's head in the Vorderasiatische Museum is of unknown provenance and is made from copper alloy and bone. One eye is lost and all that remains of the other is the white bone inlay. The Louvre bull's head is made of copper and was found at Telloh, ancient Girsu, the capital of the state of Lagash in southern modern-day Iraq, and dates to the First Dynasty of Lagash. This

bull's head still contains both eyes, made of shell and lapis lazuli. One horn is broken. The only noticeable difference between the two heads is that the Louvre bull's head contains an inscription, while the Berlin bull's head has none. This inscription reveals that the bull's head formed part of a musical instrument which was dedicated to the god Ningirsu, the patron deity of ancient Girsu<sup>8</sup>.



Figure 13: Bull's head in the Vorderasiatische Museum.



Figure 14: Bull's head from Telloh.

It has been suggested that the Louvre and Berlin bulls' heads were "mass-produced" (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:83), and it follows that they would have had the same function. The Louvre bull's head is unique in bearing an inscription which reveals its intended purpose. Presumably, if the Berlin bull's head had also been attached to an instrument which was dedicated to a god, it would also bear such an inscription. The bull's head protomes from the Royal Cemetery at Ur were found in a mortuary context, but were used for the enjoyment of the future inhabitants of the graves while they were still alive. It is likely then that the Berlin bull's head is related in function to those from the Royal Cemetery, and that it adorned a musical instrument which was intended for the use and enjoyment of mortals. The Louvre bull's head, while nearly exact in appearance to the Berlin bull's head, stands alone in definitively being dedicated to a god. It is curious that this bull's head, which is relatively simple and unadorned was attached to a musical instrument which was dedicated to a god, but the more elaborate bulls' heads of the Royal Cemetery of Ur were attached to musical instruments which were made for use by mortals. This

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<sup>8</sup>This inscription was translated in personal correspondence by Rodrigo Cabrera Pertusatti of the University of Buenos Aires. See Addendum 1.

may point to a difference in the relative wealth between Lagash, the city-state in which the Louvre bull's head was found, and Ur, in which the most ornate bulls' heads were found.

A limestone bull's head from the late Early Dynastic Period of unknown provenance [figure15] is now housed in the Louvre. This bull's head has a hole through its neck which is similar to the bull's head from the Istarat Temple at Mari, suggesting that the two bulls' heads had similar functions. The bulls' heads which are known to have been attached to musical instruments either have no holes for attachment, or they have holes which are very small. The hole through the neck of this bull's head is much larger and may have been used to attach the bull's head with a dowel to a wooden support which was displayed in a temple in a similar fashion to the bulls' heads from the Temple of Ninursag at Ubad.



Figure 15: Limestone bull's head in the Louvre.



Figure 16: Alabaster bull's head.

An alabaster bull's head of unknown provenance, now housed in the Baghdad Museum [figure 16], dates from the late Early Dynastic Period (Strommenger 1962:65). The style is realistic, and the face, ears and horns of the bull are carved from a single piece of stone. This bull's head has no holes for attachment, and at about 20 centimetres in height it is too large to have functioned as an amulet. The bulls' heads from the Royal Cemetery at Ur did not have holes for attachment either, so the alabaster bull's head could have been secured, perhaps with bitumen, to a surface. Made of alabaster, it would have been heavier than the bulls' heads made of precious metals, and it may have been too heavy to attach to a musical instrument. It would therefore more likely have served as a temple fitting, although this can never be proven because its provenance and context are unknown.

## 2.3 Bulls' Heads From Sites Outside Sumer

### 2.3.1 *Dilmun*

Perhaps the most famous object from the Dilmun culture of ancient Bahrain is a copper alloy bull's head [figure 17]. It was found during the excavation of Temple II at Barbar in northern modern-day Bahrain. The context in which it was found dates to the Isin-Larsa Period, but the hoard contained items from earlier times, so the dating of the head is uncertain (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:311). It has been compared to the Early Dynastic Sumerian heads, but differs from them by having eyes positioned to the front, where those from Sumer usually had the eyes positioned on the side of the face. The Dilmun head also had a flattened muzzle. It is uncertain whether it was made locally or imported (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:311), but when the differences between the Dilmun bull's head and the Sumerian bulls' heads are taken into account, it seems more likely that the Dilmun bull's head was produced locally. Because it was found in a temple, the bull's head most likely had some ritual function, but it is uncertain what this was.



Figure 17: Bull's head from Dilmun.



Figure 18: Bull's head from Susa.

### 2.3.2 *Susa*

A marble bull's head [figure 18] was found on the acropolis of Susa in western modern-day Iran and has been dated to around 2500 “on typological grounds” (Ben-Tor 1972:28). This bull's head is therefore contemporary with the Early Dynastic Mesopotamian bull's head protomes. The eye sockets are concave and would most likely have been inlaid. A triangle is etched on the bull's forehead. It has holes for the attachment of horns and ears. The exact provenance is unknown, so it is impossible to know how it functioned, but a third pair of holes in the neck suggest that this bull's head was an attachment of some sort, perhaps to a musical instrument.

It may also have decorated a piece of furniture or been attached to a decorative panel like the examples from the Temple of Ninhursag at Ubaid.

During the Assyrian Period bulls' heads acted as furniture fittings, but there is no evidence that bull's heads decorated furniture during the third and second millennium, although there are depictions of furniture with legs shaped like those of a bull. All of the Early Dynastic bulls' heads for which we know the provenance were found in a burial or in a temple. The bulls' heads from the Royal Cemetery at Ur which have survived were used as decorative protomes of harps and lyres. Smaller bulls' heads were used to decorate Puabi's sledge-chariot. The bull's head from Telloh and now housed in the Louvre also decorated a musical instrument. The bull's head of unknown provenance in the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin and the bull's head from Khafajeh most likely also acted as protomes for musical instruments. The bulls' heads from Ubaid were originally attached to a decorative frieze of the Temple of Ninhursag. The bull's head from the Ishtar Temple in Mari also appears to have acted as a temple fitting. The limestone bull's head now in the Louvre has a hole through the neck similar to the bull's head from the Ishtar Temple which suggests it also would have functioned as a temple fitting.

The function of the bulls' heads from outside Sumer are not as clear. The Dilmun bull's head was found in a temple and would have had some function in the cult. The provenance of the bull's head from Susa is unknown, but a pair of holes in its neck suggests that it functioned as an attachment of some sort. It may have been a protome of a musical instrument, a finial on a piece of furniture or a temple fitting.

### 3. ANATOLIA

#### 3.1. **Alytn-depe**

A gold, silver and turquoise bull's head [figure 19] dating to the late third millennium was found at Altyn-Depe in south-central modern-day Turkmenistan. It contains a crescent inlay of turquoise on its forehead<sup>9</sup>. The bull's eyes are also made of turquoise. Like the Dilmun bull's

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<sup>9</sup>This inlay is discussed below.

head, the eyes are positioned on the front of the face, and the muzzle is flattened. The horns are silver wire covered with gold foil. A gold edging hides the view from behind. It was excavated in a relatively undisturbed layer which contained no evidence of any decayed material. For these reasons it is unlikely that it formed part of a musical instrument. It is thought either to have been an amulet (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:356) or to have been fastened to a wooden pole which was covered in copper and used as an object of worship (Masson 1988:76).



Figure 19: Bull's head from Altyn-Depe.



Figure 20: Bull's head vessel from Kültepe.

### 3.2 Drinking and Libation Vessels

Animal-shaped drinking and libation vessels were produced in Anatolia from the Neolithic Period. An example of a bull-head rhyton now in the Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations was excavated at Kültepe in central modern-day Turkey and dates from 1950-1836 [figure 20]. The ears and horns are modelled, while other features are carved in relief. There are two holes in the muzzle from which water can flow. Animal-shaped vessels were primarily associated with divinities, but could also symbolise the city from which they came, as well as its ruler and religion (Aruz *et al* 2008:77). The bull was associated with the Storm God Teshub<sup>10</sup>, and although the rhyton from Kültepe did not physically represent the god, its association with him would have been obvious to the people of Anatolia in the second millennium.

### 3.3. Urartian Cauldron Handles

The Iron Age Kingdom of Urartu was centred around Lake Van in the Armenian Highland. The

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<sup>10</sup>Teshub and his association with the bull are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*.

Urartians were prolific metalworkers, particularly in decorated bronze. The most famous example of Urartian furniture is the bronze pieces making up the so-called throne from Urartian fortress of Toprakkale, located in southeastern modern-day Turkey. It is now thought that these pieces belonged to more than one piece of furniture and include figures of recumbent winged bulls (Simpson 1995:1666). There are examples of lions' feet legs, but no bulls' feet legs survive. While bulls' heads did not decorate Urartian furniture, they are found as decorative handles on large cauldrons. The bull's heads have certain distinctive characteristics, such as a curly forelock and thick eyebrows. Examples have been found as far away as Etruria in modern-day Italy (Demange et al 1995:105).

The cauldrons stood on tripods which had bull's feet, although these do not often survive. Examples of such tripods have been found in Assyria. The remains of at least sixteen such tripods were found in Room AB of the North-West Palace at Nimrud. They were found with the remains of twelve bronze cauldrons, but none of these have survived to the present day, so it is impossible to tell whether they were decorated with the bulls' heads characteristic of the Urartian vessels (Curtis & Reade 1995:144).

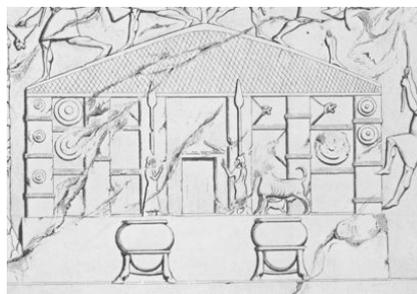


Figure 21: Relief depicting the Temple of Haldi at Musasir.

A series of reliefs from Sargon II's Palace at Khorsabad shows the sacking of the Urartian Temple of Haldi at Musasir in 713. On one relief, two cauldrons are depicted standing in front of the temple [figure 21], while on another Assyrian troops carry similar cauldrons and stands. Although the cauldrons in the reliefs do not have bull's head attachments, they are clearly related, and both types of cauldron must have had "some important ritual use" (Chahin 2001:149).

These heads sometimes had wings where they were attached to the rim of the cauldron. Muscarella (1968) divides winged bull's head attachments into two groups. The attachments of the first group [figure 22] were found in Urartu and northwest Iran and are called Urartian. They consist of a head and neck connected to a wing and tail which were cast separately. A rectangular forelock continued over the top of the bull's head and down the back of its neck. The bulls' heads faced outwards from the cauldron, and are assumed to have functioned as handles. Each cauldron had four bull's head attachments. The second group of attachments consists of a bull's head and a wing and tail which were all cast together as a single unit [figure 23]. Examples of this group come from sites including Gordion in western modern-day Turkey, Zincirli in southern modern-day Turkey and Aleppo in northern modern-day Syria. Most examples include a fixed ring behind the head for inserting a handle. The forehead usually contains a round or triangular forelock. The bulls' heads faced towards the centre of the cauldron, and only two were placed on a cauldron. The two groups of attachments look different, but their function was the same. They formed decorative handles of cauldrons which were used in the Urartian cult.



Figure 22: First type of Urartian bull's head handle.



Figure 23: Second type of Urartian bull's head handle.

The Anatolian bulls' heads were predominantly religious in nature. The bull's head from Altyn-Depe played a role in the cult, either as an amulet or as an object of worship. The drinking and libation vessels in the form of a bull's head were first and foremost related to the gods, and as such had a religious function. The bulls' heads from Urartu were attached to cauldrons. According to the reliefs from Sargon's Palace similar cauldrons were found in the Temple of Haldi at Musasir and the cauldrons were therefore used in religious rituals. It was, however, the cauldrons which were religious in nature, and not the bulls' heads themselves.

#### 4. CANAAN

Bull's head sculptures are rare in Canaan. Two bulls' heads have been found at Jericho [figure 24] (Cleveland 1961), located near the Jordan River in the West Bank in modern-day eastern Palestinian Territories; two more at 'Ay [figures 25 and 26], 16 kilometres northwest of Jericho (Ben-Tor 1972; Callaway 1974); and one at Khirbet Kerak [figure 27] on the southern shore of the Sea of Galilee in modern-day Israel (Bar-Adon 1962). These five bulls' heads date to the Early Bronze Age III<sup>11</sup> and are remarkably similar. All are made of ivory, except one of those found at Jericho which is made of stone (Ben-Tor 1972:26). Incised lines emphasise the skin-folds around the eyes and muzzle. Each bull's head has a triangular impression on the forehead for an inlay. They all have holes for the attachment of horns and ears. Holes through the necks reveal that the bulls' heads would have functioned as attachments of some sort.

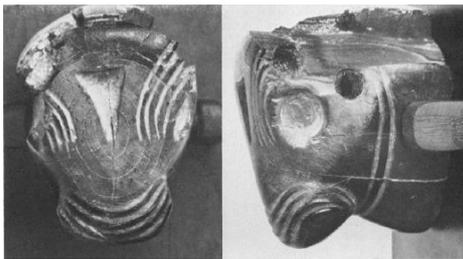


Figure 24: Ivory bull's head from Jericho.

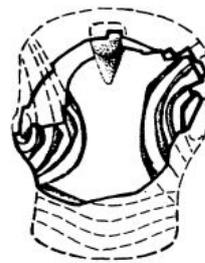


Figure 25: Bull's head from a sanctuary at 'Ay.

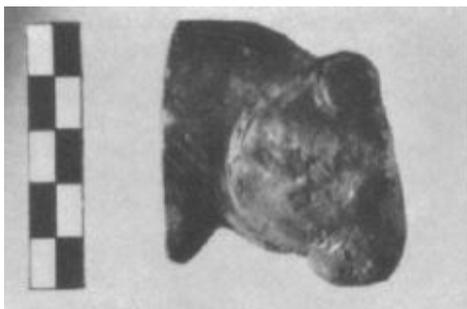


Figure 26: Bull's head from the gate Tower at 'Ay.

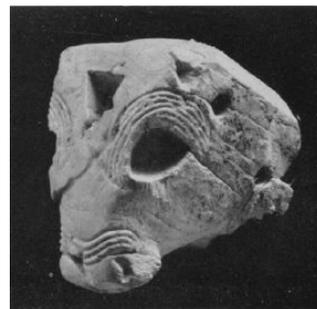


Figure 27: Bull's head from Khirbet Kerak.

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<sup>11</sup>Ben-Tor (1972:28) mentions a possible sixth head which dates to the Early Bronze Age II Period, and therefore predates these bulls' heads. This piece is made from bone and was found in the Upper City of Arad. Its identification as a bull's head is not certain and too little information is available for comparison with the other five bulls' heads.

Although the style appears to be Mesopotamian (De Vaux 1966:25), these bulls' heads are believed to have been manufactured locally. The second bull's head from 'Ay is unfinished (Callaway 1974:57), which suggests that it was made in the vicinity of the city. This supports the hypothesis that these bulls' heads were produced in Canaan. According to Ben-Tor (1972:28), the "striking similarity" between the bulls' heads suggests that they were made in the same workshop. Callaway (1974:60) posits that they were made by people who had emigrated to Canaan from North Syria, Anatolia and possibly northern Mesopotamia. In these three areas the only site which is known to have produced similar bulls' heads is Mari, which was located in northern Mesopotamia in modern-day eastern Syria. The bull's head from the Ishtar Temple at Mari has certain similarities with the heads, such as the triangular inlay on the forehead and a hole in the neck, but the Mari head is made of diorite and looks different to the Canaanite bulls' heads. The bull's head from Susa also shares these similarities<sup>12</sup>, but the proportions of the head are different, which leads Ben-Tor (1972:28) to suggest that they are not related. The Canaanite bulls' heads therefore appear to be of a separate stylistic tradition to other known bulls' heads, although they may have similar functions or meanings.

The bulls' heads from Jericho, 'Ay and Khirbet Kerak are generally thought to have been attached to a chair or throne (Cleveland 1961:33-4; De Vaux 1966:24). According to Ben-Tor (1972:25), however, it would be difficult to prove that the bulls' heads functioned as attachments. Although the reports are not clear, the bulls' heads do not appear to have been found in the vicinity of other furniture remains. Presumably, if they had functioned as furniture attachments, two bulls' heads, one for each armrest or each side of the seat, would have been found in the same context at at least one site. The exact archaeological context of the bull's head from Khirbet Kerak is uncertain, but it seems to have been found in a temple (Ben-Tor 1972:26). One of the bull's heads from 'Ay was found in a "sanctuary" (Ben-Tor 1972:24). The second, unfinished, head from 'Ay was discovered in a gate tower (Callaway 1974:57). The bull's head carved from stone from Jericho was discovered in a tomb (Ben-Tor 1972:26), and the second, ivory, bull's head from Jericho was found in a room in the southeast corner of the Eastern Tower (Cleveland 1961:30). Therefore, although two heads were discovered at both 'Ay and Jericho, these heads were not found together. In addition, the heads from Jericho were made of different

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<sup>12</sup>Although the triangle on the forehead is etched and is not an inlay.

materials, and the two heads from 'Ay appear quite different when viewed from the side, which means that neither the bulls' heads from Jericho nor those from 'Ay could have functioned as a pair.

Although the evidence seems to support Ben-Tor's hypothesis that they did not function as furniture attachments, the holes drilled in the necks of the bulls' heads prove that they must have been intended to be attachments of some kind. The reports are not clear exactly how the rooms in which the second 'Ay bull's head and the ivory bull's head from Jericho were found functioned. Shrines at city gates are referred to in Biblical passages such as 2 Kings 23:8; "the hill shrines of the demons in front of the gate of Joshua, the governor of the city, to the left of the city gate." Iron Age sanctuaries of this sort, called gate-shrines, have been found in cities such as Dan and Tell el-Far'a North in Canaan<sup>13</sup>. These gate-shrines date to least 1000 years later than the Early Bronze Age III bulls' heads, and the Biblical references are closer to 2000 years later, but it is possible that there was a tradition of sanctuaries at gates already during the Early Bronze Age. If the rooms of the gates in which the unfinished bull's head from 'Ay and the ivory bull's head from Jericho were found did function as shrines, then all five of the bulls' heads were found in ritual or religious contexts. The Early Bronze Age II Canaanite bulls' heads may therefore have had a ritual purpose. They may have functioned similarly to the Altyn-Depe head and been fastened to a pole. Two almost identical Iron Age II stelae, one from Tell el-Ash'ari now in the Damascus Museum and the other from a gate-shrine at Bethsaida depict what appears to be a bull's head which surmounts a pole with two downward-pointing 'limbs'<sup>14</sup>. This figure is believed to represent a god, either the Moon God (Bennett & Keel 1998), or the Storm God (Gray 1969:73). If fastened to posts, the five bulls' heads may represent an early manifestation of this iconography.

Although bull's head sculptures are rare in Canaan, the known examples are clearly of the same tradition. The five examples all date to the Early Bronze Age. Four are made of ivory and one of stone, and their style is very similar. They all have a triangular impression on the forehead

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<sup>13</sup>For a full discussion on Gate Shrines, see Bennett & Keel (1998).

<sup>14</sup>These stelae are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*.

which would originally have been inlaid. They functioned as attachments of some kind, and, although it is not certain, appear to have been religious in nature.

## 5. EGYPT

Examples of decorative bulls' heads are extremely rare in Egypt. A weight from the Mortuary Temple of Ramses III at Medinet Habu in southern Egypt [figure 28] is in the form of a calf's head. Plaster bull's heads which functioned as models for sculpture are known. These provided details for the sculptor when a statue of a complete bull, probably the Apis, Mnevis or Bucchis bull<sup>15</sup> was sculpted. It is possible that separate bull's heads were carved or modelled in materials which have not survived.



Figure 28: Weight in the shape of a calf's head.



Figure 29: Cows' Heads on a couch from Tutankhamun's Tomb.

Old Kingdom examples of representations of furniture show that bulls' legs were the most common type of animal leg in furniture at this time. The carving is quite intricately detailed, and shows musculature and a protruding ankle bone. By the New Kingdom the bull's leg in furniture was almost completely replaced by the use of the lion's leg (Der Manuelian 1995:1624-6). A rare example of a piece of furniture with bovine feet and heads is a ritual couch or funerary bed from Tutankhamun's tomb in the Valley of the Kings in southern Egypt. Three large beds were found in the tomb. One had sides in the shape of a lion, with two lions heads, and the legs of the bed terminating in lions' feet. The second bed was in the shape of a hybrid animal with the body

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<sup>15</sup>The Apis, Mnevis and Bucchis bulls are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*.

of a leopard, the tail of a crocodile, and the head of a hippopotamus. The third bed had the shape of a cow, with the legs terminating in bovine feet, and with a cows' heads [figure 29]. The cows carry disks between their long horns, resembling Isis' headdress. An inscription across the board of the third bed reads; "May the good god live, may he exist forever, Lord of the Two Lands, who effects the kingship of Re the Osiris, King of Upper Egypt, Nebkheper(u)re, beloved of Isis-Mehtet, justified" (James 2007:139). This suggests that the cows were intended to represent the goddess Isis<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, although this bed has bovine characteristics, it is not an example of a bull's head furniture fitting, and it should not be classified with the other bulls' head and bulls' feet furniture discussed.

No Egyptian examples of purely decorative bulls' heads exist. The bull's head from the Mortuary Temple of Ramses III functioned as a weight. Artists' models of bulls' heads can not be considered as decorative bulls' heads as they were used to provide sculptors with details to copy. The bovine heads on the bed from Tutakhamun's tomb represent the goddess Isis and do not represent decorative bull's head furniture fittings.

## 6. TRIANGULAR FOREHEAD DECORATIONS

A triangular inlay or etching decorated the foreheads of some bulls' heads. This triangle is found not only on separate bull's head protomes and fittings, but also on bull statuettes. The use of the triangle can be traced back to the Uruk Period in Mesopotamia, and, according to Zettler and Horne (1998:58), must have had "a specific meaning beyond its use as a decorative detail". According to Ben-Tor (1972:28) the triangle may originally have represented a triangle of white hair which sometimes appears on cattle's foreheads, and it later came to have some still obscure symbolic meaning. The hair on the forehead of the silver bull's head from Puabi's tomb forms a triangle. This seems to support Ben-Tor's supposition, but it may simply be a realistic depiction of the patch of hair which he mentions. The bronze head from the Royal Cemetery at Ur contained "a row of hair curls... positioned on the back side of the poll of the head, and only one row of rudimentary formed hair locks falls down on the front of the head, leaving space for

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<sup>16</sup>Isis and her association with the cow are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses*.

a triangular insert of lapis lazuli” (Zettler & Horne 1998:58). That this bull’s head contained both sculpted hairs and a triangle suggests that the triangle did not represent a patch of hair. These two heads are from the same context and date to the same period, and therefore represent the same belief system and world view. If the triangular shape formed by hairs on the silver bull’s head does represent the same concept as the inlaid triangle on the bronze head, the two would most likely have been represented in the same manner.

Callaway (1974:61), studying the bulls’ heads from Canaan, suggests the triangle was the symbol of a deity, but warns that “little is known about the deities and religion in Canaan in the Early Bronze Age.” The triangle did not only adorn bulls’ heads from Canaan, but also from Egypt, Mesopotamia and Anatolia. The triangular inlay cannot have been identified with one universal deity, because this theology simply did not exist at the time. Gods with similar characteristics from different areas were identified with each other. The triangle could have been identified with a specific type of deity.



Figure 30: Mummified head of an Apis bull with a triangle on its forehead.

In Egypt the triangle on a bull’s forehead was associated specifically with the Apis Bull. One of the distinguishing marks of the Apis was a white mark on the bull’s forehead. Rawlinson (1996:237) translates Herodotus’ *Histories* III:28 to read that the Apis is “black, with a square spot of white upon his forehead.” Cooney (1971:18) in contrast, describes the mark on the forehead to be a triangle. A mummified head of an Apis bull in the Louvre contains a white triangle on its forehead [figure 30], and Kater-Sibbes (1975:48-52) describes a series of bronze

statuettes of the Apis bull from unknown provenances which had triangles on their foreheads. The iconographic evidence therefore supports the reading that this mark was a triangle. Although the Apis bull did, at least in some cases, exhibit a triangle on its forehead, it was not worshipped in other areas of the ancient Near East during the early periods in which the bulls' heads were manufactured. The triangle can therefore not exclusively mark the Apis bull.

The Early Dynastic Louvre bull's head contains an inscription dedicating the lyre to which the bull's head was attached to the god Ningirsu. While it is interesting that Ningirsu was a Storm God and Storm Gods were usually associated with the bull<sup>17</sup>, this is most likely coincidental, because Ningirsu himself was associated with the bull, and as this is the only instance in which a bull's head attachment is definitively associated with this type of deity, and this bull's head does have an inlay on the forehead. There is also no evidence that the triangle was ever associated with any Storm God.

The bulls' heads from the Temple of Ninhursag at Ubaid come from a clear cultic context and may be associated with a divinity, but it is crescent shapes which adorn their foreheads, not triangles. Inscriptions from the Old Babylonian Period inform us that the crescent shape was identified with the Moon God Sin (Black & Green 1992:54), and it is reasonable to assume that this identification occurred at an earlier date. The horns of the bull are reminiscent of the crescent moon. The bull, the crescent moon, and the moon god therefore became associated with each other. The small golden bull's head from Altyn-Depe also has a crescent inlay on its forehead. Masson (1988:78) argues that this bull's head and the cult complex of Altyn-Depe where the bull's head was discovered were dedicated to a lunar deity, the "southern Turkmenistan variant of Nanna-Sin". It is possible that all the bulls' heads with crescent inlays were associated with a Moon God. The bull's head from Khafajeh was found in the site's Sin Temple, and for this reason the bull's head would presumably have been associated with or dedicated to Sin. This bull's head does not contain a crescent inlay, but a triangular one. The stelae from Tell el-Ash'ari and Bethsaida may have represented the Moon God, so if the bulls' heads from Canaan do represent an early manifestation of this iconography, they would also be associated with this god. Triangular impressions for inlay were found on these bulls' heads, and the triangle would thus

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<sup>17</sup>Discussed in greater detail in *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*.

be associated with the Moon God. However, there is no evidence for the triangle representing the Moon God, and although possible, it is unlikely that both the crescent and the triangle represented this god.

The bull's head fitting from the Ishtar Temple at Mari has a triangular inlay in its forehead. Like the bulls' heads from the Temple of Ninhursag at Ubaid, these bulls more likely represent the male principle, although exactly who this male deity would be is uncertain.

There is no evidence that the triangle represented one single deity. If a bull's head with a triangle did represent a god, it would have been an object of worship, it would not have functioned as a mere attachment to another object. The only bull's head which is thought to have acted as an object of worship is the Altyn-Depe bull's head. This contained an inlay in the shape of a crescent, not a triangle. The triangular inlay then did not represent a god. In fact, an Early Dynastic statuette of a bull in the Cleveland Museum of Art with a triangle on its forehead has a rope around its neck, indicating that it was domesticated. This bull therefore clearly "does not represent a deity but a typical bull from a local flock" (Cooney 1971:12). The triangle therefore cannot mark this bull as a divinity, and suggests that no other bull with a triangle on its forehead could depict a divinity either. Aruz and Wallenfels (2003:441) posit that rather than identifying the bull as a god, the triangle denotes the "sacred character of the animal", and Cooney (1971:11) identifies both the bull and the triangle with fertility<sup>18</sup>, a characteristic inherent of the gods. It is worth noting then that the Apis bull was originally associated with fertility, a fact which is compatible with this theory. The triangle therefore appears to symbolise not divinity, but divine attributes. The bull was a symbol of fertility and power across the ancient Near East, qualities which were also associated with the gods. The triangle would therefore symbolise these characteristics, and the bulls' heads which are adorned with the triangle would either be imbued with or be symbolic of these divine qualities. The bulls' heads which exhibited triangles include the bull's head from the Ishtar Temple at Mari, the bull's head from the Sin Temple at Khafajeh, the Canaanite heads, for which I have posited a religious function, the bull's head from Susa, and the bronze bull's head from Ur. Of these, the Mari and Khafajeh bulls' heads were

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<sup>18</sup>It is unclear why Cooney identifies the triangle with fertility. This identification may be due to the pubic triangle which was often emphasised on depictions of females. This, however, would be symbol of feminine fertility, and would be at odds with the masculine fertility or virility of the bull.

found in temples and are clearly associated with religion, and I have posited a religious function for the Canaanite bulls' heads. The bull's head from Susa is of unknown provenance and its function is therefore unknown, but it is similar to the Canaanite heads, and could therefore also be related to the cult. The bronze bull's head from Ur is the only bull's head which does not have this religious association. It was discovered in the death pit of Tomb PG 1332, a burial for which the tomb chamber was not found (Zettler & Horne 1998:57). The identity of the owner of the tomb is unknown, but it is possible that this person played some role in the cult of Ur. The triangle would then have denoted the sacred nature of the bull and by extension the sacred nature of whatever object to which the bull's head was attached.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Decorative bulls' heads were manufactured across a wide area of the ancient Near East. They have been found in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Canaan, but purely decorative bull's heads have not been found in Egypt. The calf's head weight from Ramses III's Mortuary Temple is unique amongst the bulls' heads discussed above because, while it was in the form of a bovine head, it was a functional object in and of itself and had no ritual connotations. The bull's head from Altyn-Depe may have been an amulet or an object of worship, and was therefore a cult object, not a functional object. Most of the bulls' heads date to the third millennium, but some examples, such as the Urartian bull's heads cauldron handles and the Assyrian furniture fittings date to the first millennium. The Anatolian drinking and libation vessels are the only objects in the form a bull's head which date from the second millennium. There is therefore no continuity between the third millennium and first millennium examples, and they must represent traditions which arose separately.

The majority of bulls' heads from Sumer were attached to musical instruments or acted as temple fittings. Except for the smaller bulls' heads which were attached to Puabi's Sledge-Chariot, the bulls' heads from Ur were attached to musical instruments, as most likely were the bull's head in the Vorderasiatische Museum and the bull's head from Khafajeh. The bulls' heads from Ubaid were attached to a frieze which decorated the temple of Ninhursag, and the bull's head from the Ishtar Temple at Mari and the limestone bull's head housed in the Louvre both appear

to have functioned as temple fittings.

During the Assyrian Period bulls' heads were used as decorative furniture fittings. There is no iconographical evidence for bulls' heads serving as furniture fittings before the Assyrian Period although there are depictions from the Early Dynastic Period of furniture with bulls' feet. It is possible that some of the Early Dynastic bulls' heads whose functions are not certain could have functioned as furniture fittings. In the Assyrian reliefs pieces of furniture with bulls' legs are found in association with the king, and these pieces would therefore have belonged to the social elite. The decorative bull's head is therefore associated with the social elite during both the third millennium at the Royal Cemetery at Ur and the first millennium in Assyria. Bulls' heads are much more commonly found in religious settings. In fact, all of the Early Dynastic bulls' heads of known provenance were associated with a burial or a temple, and as such have a religious or ritual aspect to them.

This does not mean that they were ritual or cult objects. The lyres with bulls' heads found in the Royal Cemetery at Ur were intended to accompany the deceased into the afterlife and were discovered in the graves of the social elite. At least some of the bulls' heads lyres from Ur were actually used while the deceased was alive. Because they were used for the enjoyment of the social elite, they can not have been purely ritual objects. The exception is the bull's head from Telloh which is now housed in the Louvre and was attached to a musical instrument that was dedicated to the god Ningirsu. It is the only bull's head which is known to have been attached to an object which was dedicated to a deity. The Khafajeh bull's head was discovered in the Sin Temple, and it is possible that it was attached to a musical instrument that was dedicated to this god, but there is no evidence to prove this.

The bull's head from Dilmun was found in a temple and had some ritual purpose. Its appearance is similar to the bulls' heads from Early Dynastic Sumer and it may have had a similar function, either decorating a musical instrument or acting as a decorative temple fitting. The holes in the neck of the bull's head from Susa suggest that it also acted as an attachment of some sort. Like the bull's head from Dilmun, it may have decorated a musical instrument or served as a temple fitting. The triangle on its forehead suggests that it was somehow related to the cult.

The bull's heads from Anatolia were predominantly religious in nature. The Altyn-Depe bull's head dates to the same period as those from Early Dynastic Mesopotamia, but functioned differently. It is unique because it did not function as an attachment, but as an object on its own, and it played a role in the cult of Altyn-Depe, either as an amulet or an object of worship. The Urartian bulls' heads cauldron handles date to about a millennia and a half after the bull's head from Altyn-Depe, but also played a role in the cult. The cauldrons to which they were attached were used in temples for religious rituals. The bull was associated with the Storm God Teshub, and although the bull's head drinking and libation vessels did not represent Teshub, they had implicit religious connotations. The bulls' heads from Urartu were of a more obvious ritual nature than the bulls' heads from Mesopotamia.

Only a handful of decorative bulls' heads have been found in Canaan, but these pieces are so similar that they must have had the same function and meaning. They all have a triangular impression on the forehead which would have held an inlay, and all have holes for attachment. Although it is uncertain exactly how they functioned, they seem to have been religious in nature, and at least some may have played a role in rituals at the gates of cities.

More examples of bulls' heads come from Mesopotamia than from any other area, but the Dilmun, Altyn-Depe and Canaanite bulls' heads demonstrate that this tradition covered a wide area, from the Mediterranean Coast to modern-day Turkmenistan. The Altyn-Depe head was produced after the Early Dynastic Sumerian heads, and while the exact date of the production of the Dilmun head and those from Canaan is uncertain, it is likely that they too were produced at a later date. These bulls' heads are somewhat stylised, demonstrating a development from the more realistic Sumerian bull's heads. It is uncertain whether this evolution is due to chronological or geographic considerations. In either case, it seems clear that the peripheral areas did not try to reproduce exact copies of the Mesopotamian examples. This is further demonstrated in the function of the bulls' heads. The majority of Early Dynastic Sumerian bulls' heads functioned as protomes to musical instruments or as temple fittings, but this was not the case for the examples from other areas. The Altyn-Depe bull's head most likely had some cultic function, while the Urartian bulls' heads decorated cauldrons and furniture. The Canaanite bulls'

heads functioned as attachments of some sort and, similarly to the Altyn-Depe bull's head, appear to have played a role in the cult. It is possible that some of the bulls' heads whose functions are uncertain originally formed part of composite statues, or, like those from the Ninhorsag Temple at Ubaid, formed part of a relief. It is also possible that they, like the Assyrian bulls' heads, were attached to pieces of furniture.

Except for the Altyn-Depe bull's head, the drinking and libation vessels from Anatolia, and the calf's head weight from Ramses III's Mortuary Temple, the bulls' heads did not function on their own, but were attached to other objects, whether that be musical instruments, furniture or temple walls and decorations. Many of the bulls' heads were attached to objects for the cult, but it was these objects which were religious or ritual in nature, and not the bulls' heads themselves. Some bulls' heads' foreheads had a triangular or crescent etching or inlay. The crescent is associated with the Moon God, and the bulls are therefore associated with this god. The triangle seems to represent divine characteristics, and the triangle on some of the bull's heads associates them with these characteristics. The bulls' heads with these symbols were generally found in a more religious context than the bull's heads with no symbol.

Very few bull's heads functioned as objects in and of themselves. Most were attachments of some sort. The majority of bulls' heads for which the provenance is known were associated either with the social elite or with the temple, and therefore reflect luxury objects. Many are of unknown provenance or context, and it is very difficult to assign a function or meaning to these bulls' heads. While the triangle and crescent on some bulls' heads' foreheads reveal a symbolic function, not all bulls' heads contained these. This symbolism may have been implicit on the bulls' heads without the shapes on their foreheads, but these bulls' heads may equally have been purely decorative fittings. In either case, the bulls' heads would not have been produced in such quantities to adorn objects of cultural importance unless the animal was important to the people of the ancient Near East.

### **CHAPTER 3: CONTEST SCENES**

*Contest scenes can be divided into animal contest scenes, in which only animals took part, and mythological contest scenes, in which mythological creatures took part. Both types were depicted in the art of the ancient Near East, but were popular at different times and in different areas. Depictions of contest scenes from across the ancient Near East will be examined to identify the meaning of these contests scenes.*

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the art of the ancient Near East, the bull was depicted involved in struggles with other animals or mythological creatures. Fights between bulls and lions are particularly significant. These struggles were depicted most frequently on cylinder seals and have become known as combat or, more commonly, contest scenes.

The meaning of these contest scenes, and therefore the bull's role in them, is difficult to ascertain, and has been much debated. The earliest examples depict the struggle between domesticated and wild animals. The advent of these scenes coincided with the period of early urbanization in the late fourth millennium. It is possible that the wild animals represented forces of nature, and that the domesticated animals represented the newly urbanised peoples. As domesticated animals became increasingly important to man and his survival, the loss of this vital commodity would have become more and more devastating. The struggles would therefore reflect a preoccupation with the struggles for life (Garbini 1966:16). The gods and the divine world were constantly on the minds of the peoples of the ancient Near East. The combatants in contest scenes may have represented conflicting divine forces (Frankfort 1996:30), or the struggle between the natural order which was imposed by the gods, and the forces of chaos (Ascalone 2005:19). In relation to this, there have been arguments that contest scenes represent some myth which is now lost to us (Rice 1998:109). In order to ascertain which of these interpretations are valid, the contest scenes themselves must first be studied.

## 2. MAIN PARTICIPANTS IN COMBAT SCENES

### 2.1 Animals

The lion was the main antagonist in contest scenes during all periods. The bull was the lion's original victim. In this case, the bull must represent the domestic bull, and not the wild bull, which was a symbol of power and strength. Other opponents included the leopard and the lion-griffin. Later the bull, like the lion, became an opponent of supernatural beings (Collon 2005:193-7). Animal contest scenes sometimes included fantastical beasts, such as the griffon.

### 2.2 Supernatural Beings

#### 2.2.1 *The Hero*

The 'hero' is a conventional term for a human figure whose identity varies and is sometimes unclear. He first appears in the art of Mesopotamia and Elam from the late Uruk Period (Aruz & Wallenfles 2003:50; Hansen 1963:158). The hero is generally depicted frontally and is usually naked except for a triple-stranded belt. His hair is in an elaborate style consisting of three curls on either side of his face (Lambert 1985:447), and he is usually bearded [figure 1]. In some contest scenes there are two heroes. From the Middle Assyrian Period onward the figure sometimes has wings, and is then generally referred to as a genie (Collon 2005:197).



Figure 1: Akkadian cylinder seal with a depiction a lion, bull-man, bull and nude hero.

The nude hero is shown protecting domestic animals, particularly bulls, from wild predators. Because of this function, Lambert (1979:4) identified him as Dumuzi the shepherd, who, according to the Sumerian kinglist, became the king of antediluvian Babtibira. This identification is now discredited, but there remain examples where the hero represented a king (Mobley 1997:223).

In most cases the nude hero is probably the *lahmu*<sup>1</sup>, the Hairy One. The *lahmu* was a protective and beneficent deity who mastered wild animals. He was a spirit of the rivers, and took care of domesticated herds with his water (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:48). He was originally associated with Enki or his Akkadian counterpart Ea, and later with Marduk (Black & Green 1992:115). Mobley (1997:231) compares the *lahmu* with the Biblical Samson. He interprets the reference in Judges 16:13-14 to Samson wearing his hair in seven locks to be an Israelite variation on the traditional six locks of hair worn by the *lahmu*. Samson's wrestling with the lion in Judges 14:6 is seen as a verbal expression of the iconographic motif of the combat scene.

The hero is not always the *lahmu*, although the precise identification of the hero is not always clear. As Ellis (1995:165) points out, the hero was an ancient figure "in Mesopotamian tradition, and had come in and out of the Assyrian repertory more than once, perhaps with different names at different times and contexts." It is likely then that the hero was an archetype, representing different figures at different periods. However, it is certain that the hero was never a mere mortal. Either he represented a mythological or superhuman being, or he represented the king in a heroic pose.

### 2.2.2 *The Bull-Man*

The hero was closely associated with the bull-man. This was an anthropomorphic figure with the face and upper body of a man<sup>2</sup>, and the lower body, ears and horns of a bull. The bull-man is first attested in Mesopotamia in the Early Dynastic II Period, and may have originated in Elam (Black & Green 1992:48; Collon 2005:197). In Sumerian he is known as **gud-alim**, in Akkadian as *kusarikku* (Lambert 1985:447). According to Rice, the bull-man and other composite bull creatures were meant to express the animal nature of man more forcefully. He argues that the bull-man emerged during the "phase of development which culminated in the structuring of city-based, hierarchical societies" (1998:272), and that it represented man's dominance and control

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<sup>1</sup>See Ellis (1995) for a discussion on the difficulties of identification of the hero with the *lahmu*.

<sup>2</sup>There are no known examples of a female equivalent of the bull-man. The Egyptian goddess Hathor had certain bovine attributes, such as the horns and ears of a cow. Interestingly, a copper statuette from Bactria represents a female figure with horns and the face of a lioness. This is noteworthy because, as bulls were symbolic of masculine strength and were associated with gods, lionesses were likewise associated with goddesses, and therefore represented the feminine.

over wild animals.

Examples of bull-men sculpted in the round are extremely rare. Two examples were found together at Umma and were carved from translucent green-yellow alabaster with red veins<sup>3</sup>. They are drilled holes for the attachment of horns, ears, a tail and lower legs (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:52). They date to the Early Dynastic I Period, circa 2900-2650. One is housed in the George Ortiz Collection [figure2], while the other, which is slightly smaller, is in the Baghdad Museum (Chippendale & Gill 2000:487). They were likely produced in the same workshop, if not by the same hand. There is a vertical hole in the head of the example in the George Ortiz Collection. This suggests that it was a cult object, as the hole could have been for a removable offering bowl (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:52).



Figure 2: Alabaster statuette of a bull-man.



Figure 3: Baked clay plaque depicting two bull-men holding a pole surmounted by a sun-disk.

In contest scenes bull-men were shown singly, in pairs, or even in triplicate. From the Old Babylonian Period the bull-man appears on cylinder seals as well as in other forms of art in association with the sun god, either beneath the seated god's feet, or holding a pole surmounted with a sun-disk [figure 3] (Lambert 1985:448). In later periods the bull-man was more often found as an attendant to the sun god in areas outside Mesopotamia. A relief from Tell Halaf in northeastern Syria depicts two bull-men supporting a winged sun-disk with a third figure

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<sup>3</sup>According to Aruz and Wallenfels (2003:51) these are the only two known examples of bull-men sculpted in the round, although another is known from the 1953 excavations at Nimrud, and is discussed below.

kneeling beneath the winged disk<sup>4</sup>. While most bull-men in Anatolia are represented with the lower part of their bodies as that of a bull, the upper part as that of a man, and with bull's ears and horns, a pair of bull-men on an orthostat from Karatepe are depicted with the legs of bulls, but without the horns and ears [figure 4].



Figure 4: Bull-men on an orthostat from Karatepe.

In Anatolia, bull-men are in all periods found in contest scenes with a single lion. A depiction apparently unique to Anatolian art is the bull-man with streams of water issuing from his shoulders or waist. Because the *lahmu* was a spirit of the rivers, Lambert (1985:448) believes that Anatolian artists created this figure by merging the bull-man and *lahmu*.

#### 2.2.2.1 The Human-Headed Bull

The human-headed bull<sup>5</sup> was included in combat scenes for a relatively short period of time. First appearing as an animal which needed protection by the hero during the late Early Dynastic and Akkadian periods, it soon became an opponent. It had disappeared from contest scenes by the Old Babylonian Period (Collon 2005:197).

#### 2.2.2.2 The Minotaur

Depictions of bull-men of the classical minotaur appearance, with the lower body of a man and

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<sup>4</sup>Frankfort (1996:259-60) believes that Assyria is the source of this motif, while Collon (2005:197) argues that the reappearance of the bull-man in Assyria is “probably the result of Syrian influence”.

<sup>5</sup>Discussed in more detail in *Chapter 11: The Bull and Composite Bull Figures as Protective Beings*.

the head of a bull, are very rare. A Syrian cylinder seal<sup>6</sup> in the British Museum depicts a nude goddess, two gods, and two minotaurs [figure 5]. Between the two minotaurs is a crescent cradling a circle. A truncated fragment of a door seal with a seal impression from the Acropolis at Susa, the Elamite capital in southwest Iran, dating to the mid-third millennium, is divided into two registers [figure 6]. The upper register contains a variety of gods and mythical creatures, including a minotaur which stands facing a figure which may be classified as a hero. The lower register contains, amongst others, a contest scene which includes two lions, a human-headed bull, a hero, and a bull-man. The presence of both the bull-man and the minotaur on the same seal indicates that depictions of the bull-man and the minotaur did not represent the same being.



Figure 5: Syrian seal impression with minotaurs.



Figure 6: Elamite seal with minotaurs.

### 2.2.3 *The Hero and the Bull-Man as Collaborators*

The hero and the bull-man were often found in association with each other. In the past these two figures have been identified as Gilgamesh and Enkidu (Green 1995:1851). This identification is now considered to be incorrect. If Gilgamesh was a historical figure, he would have ruled Uruk when Mes-ane-pada ruled Ur during the 26<sup>th</sup> century. By this time the iconography of the *lahmu*, as well as that of the bull-man, was already well developed (Collon 2005:197). In addition, there are depictions of Gilgamesh and Enkidu in combat scenes which are of a clearer context, in which they do not take on the appearance of the *lahmu* and the bull-man. Examples of such depictions include a terracotta plaque depicting the slaying of the Bull of Heaven from the early second millennium in the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:483).

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<sup>6</sup>According to the British Museum database (Museum Number ME 89320) this cylinder seal may be from Cyprus. Nigel Tallis, Curator (Later Mesopotamia) of the British Museum confirmed in personal correspondence my belief that it is likely Syrian. If, however, the cylinder seal is Cypriot, these figures may represent priests wearing bull masks, as discussed in *Chapter 1: Bucrania*.

A Neo-Babylonian chalcedony cylinder seal in the British Museum depicts Ishtar trying to prevent Gilgamesh and Enkidu from killing the Bull of Heaven (McCall 1990:44). A nude hero fighting a bull on a terracotta plaque from the Ur III Period in the Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire in Brussels, and one on a shell plaque in the California Museum of Ancient Art are often identified as Gilgamesh (Bienkowski & Millard 2000:128). However, the hero on the plaque has the six locks of hair which would identify him as the *lahmu*, and these works would then depict contest scenes.

In the *Enûma Elish*, the Babylonian creation epic, Tiamat, the primordial goddess of the ocean and the main antagonist in the myth, creates eleven monsters to join her in battle against the gods. Eight of these have been identified in art, including the *lahmu*, or Hairy One, and the Bison, or Bull-man (Green 1995:1853). The story probably dates to around the Old Babylonian Period (Dalley 2000:230), about a millennium after the *lahmu* and bull-man are first attested. It is possible that these creatures were assembled together in the *Enûma Elish* to explain their continued existence in the art. Although malevolent in the epic, the bull-man and the *lahmu* were more commonly seen as protective beings.

During the 1953 excavations at Nippur in southern Iraq a pair of figurines, one a bull-man and the other a warrior, were found in a foundation box under a floor in the Burnt-Palace (Mallowan 1954:87). If the warrior is related to the hero, this is an interesting example of this figure being found in association with the bull-man, just as they are associated with each other in the *Enûma Elish* and on cylinder seals.

### 3. MESOPOTAMIA

Contest scenes appear in the art and iconography of Mesopotamia more frequently than the art of any other area. These contest scenes can be divided into animal contest scenes and mythological contest scenes<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup>The term 'mythological' should not be understood to imply a mythological setting for the contest scenes, but rather to denote that mythic creatures, such as the hero and the bull-man, act as participants.

### 3.1 Animal Contest Scenes

The combatants in animal contest scenes were from the natural world, and consisted mostly of bulls, deer, lions and other felines such as leopards and cheetahs, although there are examples of mythical beasts such as griffins. Of all animal contest scenes, those depicting the bull and the lion are the most common and the most widespread.

#### 3.1.1 Seals

Contest scenes were one of the principal subjects of cylinder seals, and date from as early as the Uruk Period. The contest scenes on the early seals from the Uruk and Jemdet Nasr periods depicted domesticated animals being attacked by wild animals. Contest scenes from the late fourth millennium generally represented a lion attacking a bull from behind [figure 7]. Later this developed into a frontal attack (Collon 2005:27). Elamite seals show a variation on the naturalistic depictions of Mesopotamia. An impression of a Proto-Elamite clay tablet from Susa dating to circa 2900 shows a lion and bull in human poses<sup>8</sup>. The lion shoots an arrow at a bull, while a second bull uses a club to strike a lion on the head. Another Elamite seal depicts a bull standing upright on its hind legs dominating two lions and a lion in the same posture dominating two bulls [figure 8].



Figure 7: Uruk Period cylinder seal impression.



Figure 8: Elamite cylinder seal impression.

By the middle of the Early Dynastic Period contestants were shown vertically, with animals standing on their hind legs. This change allowed for the development of more intricate

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<sup>8</sup>Although common in glyptic art, there are few sculptures in the round of animals engaged in human activities. A silver figure of a kneeling bull holding a vessel is one of the few examples. It is from Iran from the Proto-Elamite Period, circa 3000-2800 and is now in the Metropolitan Museum. Because it contains several pebbles, it is thought that it may have functioned as a noisemaker and was probably a cult object (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:43).

compositions with the animals having more complex postures (Collon 2005:27; Rice 1998:108). The scenes were usually carved as friezes of closely-knit, interconnected figures, emphasising the continuity of the struggle (Aruz and Wallenfels 2003:218). Figures such as the hero and the bull-man became more common during the Early Dynastic Period, and the animal combat of earlier times developed into a mythical contest.

### 3.1.2 *Minor Arts*

The earliest depictions of animal contest scenes are found on some cult vessels from Uruk. A stone ewer from the Uruk Period, now in the Baghdad Museum [figure 9], bears apparently the earliest representation of a combat scene. On either side of the vessel a lion is depicted in high relief with its claws in the flank of a bull. Two more lions decorate the vessel's spout. This ewer was likely a cult vessel (Rizza 2007:32). The lion was the sacred animal of Inanna, who was, perhaps notably, the patron deity of Uruk. A ritual vase dating to the same period is now in the British Museum [figure 10]. It is decorated in high relief with a lion sinking its claws into the backs of two bulls which are on either side of the vessel. A third limestone vase from the Jemdet Nasr Period is housed in the Louvre [figure 11]. It consists of two registers, the upper register containing four lions and the lower register showing a bull being attacked by lions. The three vessels probably served similar functions, and the symbolism would therefore also have been similar. According to Frankfort (1996:29), it is unlikely that these decorations depict a mere attack on the herds by a predator, but the exact meaning and significance of the animal combat is uncertain.



Figure 9: Uruk Period vessel in the Baghdad Museum.



10: Uruk Period vessel in the British Museum.

A dark chlorite vase dating from the middle of the third millennium found in Khafajeh in the Diyala region of Iraq is now in the British Museum. The decoration on the vase primarily depicts a goddess as a master of the animals, but also contains a scene of a lion and a bird of prey attacking a bull which is lying on its back [figure 12] (Ascalone 2005:246-7).



Figure 11: Uruk Period vessel in the Louvre.



Figure 12: Vase from Khafajeh (detail).

A white stone plaque found in the Inanna Temple at Nippur has been dated to the Early Dynastic II Period. The upper register is the only register which survives in its entirety. This depicts a lion attacking a bull [figure 13]. Above the bull is a crescent moon<sup>9</sup> (Hansen 1963:153; Plate III). An Early Dynastic ivory plaque from Telloh and now in the Louvre was also incised with a depiction of a lion attacking a bull [figure 14].

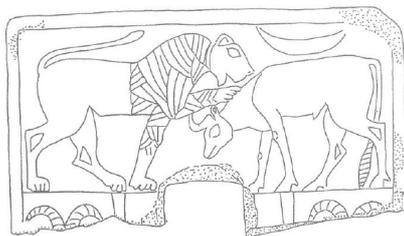


Figure 13: Whitestone plaque from Nippur.



Figure 14: Plaque from Telloh.

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<sup>9</sup>The crescent may associate this bull with the Moon God, as discussed in *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*.

Depictions of lion-bull conflicts continued to be produced during all periods in Mesopotamia. A bronze disc which may have constituted the middle of a shield from Khorsabad dating to the eighth century depicts a lion attacking a bull from above [figure 15].

### 3.1.3 *The Persepolis Reliefs*

The lion attacking the bull was a common motif in the relief decoration at Persepolis. The lion attacks the bull from behind, sinking its claws and teeth into the bull's rump. The bull rears, turning to face the lion [figure 16]. This motif was a standard filling for corners, occurring 27 times at Persepolis (Hinnels 1985:104). Because the lion-bull combat is depicted so frequently at Persepolis, and because it appears in important locations, such as near the throne room, an important symbolic significance is suggested for this image.



Figure 15: Bronze disc from Khorsabad.



Figure 16: Relief from Persepolis.

According to Fennelly (1980:135), Darius constructed Persepolis to function as a ceremonial site for a ritual based on the *Enûma Elish*, and ordered that the Persian New Year's festival of *Nowrūz* be held here. Fennelly argues that the relief decoration at Persepolis symbolises and represents events which occurred during this festival. His view is supported by Hartner's (1965:3) equation of the combatting lion and bull with the zodiacal signs of Leo and Taurus and his identification of the earliest lion-bull combat iconography with celestial movements. Once a year the constellation Leo is at the zenith of the night sky, while Taurus is starting to dip below the horizon. Using the principal of precession, Hartner calculated that this astronomical event occurred at the Spring equinox during the fourth millennium and that from this time it was used as a seasonal marker. By the time of the Achaemenid Persian empire, this event occurred on 28

March, a week later than the Spring equinox (Hartner & Ettinghausen 1964:164). The lion and bull constellations were used as seasonal markers and in iconography their combat came to symbolise the beginning of the Zoroastrian year, the *Nowrīz* (Hartner 1965:16).

There are, however, holes in this hypothesis. Fennelly's argument relies on the assumption that Persepolis is the place where the king celebrated the New Year, but there is no textual evidence that this was the case (Calmeyer 1980:55). No shrine or temple has been recognised on the site (Bienkowski & Millard 2000:226), adding further argument against any ritual activity or function at the site. Another problem with the astronomical interpretation is the extremely long history and wide diffusion of representations of lions and bulls in combat. The earliest of these date to the Protoliterate Period (Hansen 1963:156). Due to the occurrence of this theme over such a long period of time, it seems evident that it must have a deeper symbolic meaning, although unfortunately there is no textual evidence for this meaning (Calmeyer 1980:9).

Calmeyer (1980:61) argues that all the reliefs at Persepolis can be most easily explained as expressions of royalty and secular power. In that case the lion in these reliefs symbolises the king, and the bull his foes or peoples whom he has subjugated. In this way the motif symbolises one great nation defeating another. In relation to this, it is interesting to note that the lion-bull combat motif occurs 27 times at Persepolis (Hinnells 1985:104) and that Persia had 27 tributary nations (Fennelly 1980:162), although this is most likely completely coincidental.

#### 3.1.4 *The Anzu Bird and the Bull*

A variation on the theme of lion-bull combat is that of the Anzu bird<sup>10</sup> and the bull, sometimes represented by the human-headed bull. The Anzu was a creature in Mesopotamian mythology and iconography which had the body of an eagle and the head of a lion. It is first attested in the Early Dynastic Period, characteristically as the central figure between two wild beasts, which, according to Leick (1998:9), suggests a protective or preventative attitude. There are ample examples of these animals being bulls, but the Anzu is also often found between other animals

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<sup>10</sup>Anzu is the creature's Akkadian name. In Sumerian it was known as the Imdugud. For sake of convenience, Anzu will be used throughout.

such as lions or stags<sup>11</sup>.

The so-called Standard of Ebla dates to around 2300 and was found in Palace G at Ebla in southwest Syria. It consisted of a series of limestone inlays which were applied to planks of wood which decorated a wall (Akkermans & Schwartz 2003:240-1). There are alternating registers of soldiers and the Anzu bird and human-headed bulls [figure 17]. Most of the inlays are broken, and have pieces missing, but those depicting the Anzu and human-headed bulls were clearly originally in the characteristic emblematic grouping. According to Aruz and Wallenfels (2003:175) this image is associated with warfare and the victorious king, an association which is made apparent on the mythological side of the Stele of the Vultures of Eannatum of Lagash where the Anzu is found alongside the triumphant god Ningirsu (Demange *et al* 1995:25). The association with warfare on the Standard of Ebla is further emphasised by the placing of the motif of the Anzu with the human-headed bulls alongside the soldiers.



Figure 17: Anzu from the Standard of Ebla.



Figure 18: Early Dynastic limestone plaque.

Less commonly, the Anzu was portrayed as an aggressor. A limestone plaque with the Anzu bird attacking a human-headed bull was excavated at the Early Dynastic Ninhursag Temple at Ubaid and is now housed in the University of Pennsylvania Museum [figure 18]. The Anzu stands on the back of the human-headed bull and bites into its hindquarters. This attacking pose is found almost exclusively at the end of the Early Dynastic Period (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:88). It is

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<sup>11</sup>Examples include the copper frieze from the temple of Ninhursag at Ubaid, now in the British Museum, on which the Anzu holds the rumps of a stag in each claw, and the Silver Vase of Entemena of Lagash, now in the Louvre, on which the Anzu is depicted grasping the rumps of stags and lions.

also found in the bottom register of one of the end panels of the Standard of Ur where the Anzu is shown attacking a recumbent human-headed bull on either side of what appears to be a mountain from which a plant grows.

An Early Dynastic cylinder seal in the British Museum depicts two human-headed bulls being attacked by two Anzuses, which in turn are being attacked by a hero and a bull-man [figure 19]. This cylinder seal is notable because the Anzu and human-headed bull are involved in a more conventional contest scene.

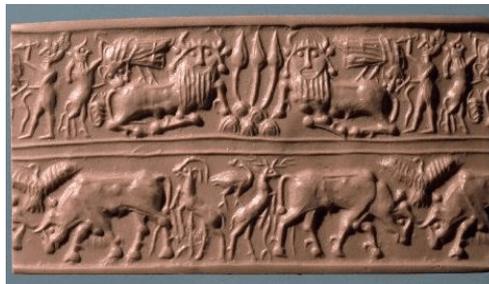


Figure 19: Early Dynastic seal impression with the Anzu involved in a contest scene.

Because the Anzu was in later texts associated with the sun god Shamash (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:88) and because of the long association of the bull with the moon, Cashford (2003:318) understands the motif of the Anzu attacking a bull to represent the slaying of the moon by the sun. Lindsay (1971:22), in comparison, proposed that the lion-bull contest represented dusk, with the lion-star attacking the bull of day. It is impossible that both of these interpretations are correct, if indeed either is.

It is possible though that such representations of the Anzu generally had no symbolic meaning, but portrayed the Anzu's normal behaviour in its natural habitat<sup>12</sup>. In the Sumerian *Lugalanda and the Anzud bird* (lines 61-66), the Anzu bird is described as “herding together wild bulls of the mountains, Anzu was herding together wild bulls of the mountains. He held a live bull in his

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<sup>12</sup>Although the British Museum cylinder seal discussed above suggests that at least some such depictions did have a deeper meaning.

talons, he carried a dead bull across his shoulders” (Black *et al* 2006:24).

## 3.2 Mythological Contest Scenes

### 3.2.1 *Seals*

During the Early Dynastic Period the hero and the bull-man were commonly depicted in contest scenes on cylinder seals, and by the Akkadian Period these mythological contest scenes became the most common theme in glyptic art (Black & Green 1992:49). The friezes of the Early Dynastic Period contest scenes gave way to separate groups which become increasingly independent of each other until they were restricted to pairs of evenly-matched opponents. Because inscriptions became longer, the design needed to be smaller, and there were usually only two pairs of combatants depicted (Collon 2005:32). These two groups often consisted of the nude hero fighting the bull and the bull-man fighting the lion [figure 1]. Power and dominance were emphasised in the new designs (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:218), which corresponds to the generally more martial approach of Akkadian compared to earlier art.

The Post-Akkadian and Ur III periods were characterised by political upheaval and uncertainty. This is reflected in the contest scenes of this time. Two heroes are now needed to combat a lion where previously only one was necessary (Collon 2005:36). Old Babylonian contest scenes are much like their Akkadian and Early Dynastic predecessors. The conventions for the second half of the second millennium are unclear, but those of Neo-Assyrian seals were already set in Middle Assyrian times. A hero or a winged genie would grasp the forelegs of two rearing opponents [figure 20]. These foes usually also had wings, and can be bulls, lions, or composite creatures (Curtis & Reade 1995:184-5). This motif continued into the Achaemenid Persian Period (Collon 2005:197). The mythical creatures and demons were also portrayed fighting amongst themselves, with no human participant. A twelfth to tenth century Assyrian seal shows a winged griffin and a griffin-demon confronting each other above a kneeling calf (Albenda 1978:19). Another motif which would become typical of Neo-Babylonian seals was that of an armed hero fighting a lion while placing his foot on a small bull. An example of this type is the cylinder seal of Hazannu in the British Museum [figure 21]. This design harkens back to the Early Dynastic Period in terms of theme, in that a hero is defending a bull from the attack of a lion.



Figure 20: Assyrian cylinder seal impression.



Figure 21: The cylinder seal of Hazannu.

By the Neo-Babylonian Period, the hero again frequently has only one opponent, and holds a scimitar (Collon 2005:197). A chalcedony cylinder seal in the British Museum shows a kneeling, kilted hero with curls, lifting a lion above his head. The bull is no longer depicted in this seal, but, when considering the long history of this motif, it seems logical that the hero is fighting the lion to protect the bull, and that the bull is still implicit to the combat scene.

Contest scenes originated in Mesopotamia and Elam, but they were not restricted to the glyptic of this region. Their use and iconography were adopted and adapted in neighbouring areas. Anatolian glyptic, for example, borrowed many motifs, including contest scenes, directly from Mesopotamia. Combats between a bull-man and a lion appear to have been particularly popular<sup>13</sup> (Canby 1995:1678).

### 3.2.2 *Vessels with Nude Heroes and Animals in Relief*

Contest scenes were one of the favourite themes of glyptic art, but there are few depictions in other media. The earliest depictions of the *lahmu*, bull and lion are found together on a series of vessels decorated in relief dating from the Jemdet-Nasr to the Early Dynastic I Period, circa 3000-2650. One such vessel from limestone is now in the British Museum [figure 22], while another is in the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago [figure 23].

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<sup>13</sup>Because the depiction of contest scenes on seals followed a similar evolution in all areas of the ancient Near East except Egypt, this development will not be discussed in the following sections on the Levant and Anatolia.



Figure 22: Jemdet-Nasr vessel  
in the British Museum.



Figure 23: Jemdet-Nasir vessel  
in the Oriental Institute.

The example from the British Museum is unprovenanced (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:48). It has carved on either side a front-facing figure of a *lahmu*, naked except for a belt. One figure has either arm around the neck of a bull, while the second figure holds their rumps. A large bird sits on the back of each bull. The vessel in the Oriental Institute was excavated at the Shara Temple at Tell Agrab and dates to the Early Dynastic II Period (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:50). It depicts a single figure of a *lahmu* holding the rump of a lion in either hand. Above these lions stand two more lions, the tails of which are tucked under the *lahmu*'s arms. On the opposite side of the vessel to the *lahmu* is a bull.

### 3.2.3 *Other Media*

A small gold pendant depicting a bull-man subduing two human-headed bulls contains a contest scene in the round which closely resembles those found in two-dimensional glyptic [figure 24]. It dates to the Early Dynastic III Period and is now in the Louvre. A bull-man stand between two human-headed bulls and grasps them by the forelegs. The missing faces would have been made of semiprecious stones.



Figure 24: Gold Pendant in the form of a contest scene.

The front panel of the soundbox of the Great Lyre, excavated at the Royal Burials at Ur, was decorated with four registers of shell inlay. Each register was made from a plaque, the background was cut away and filled with bitumen. The top register depicts a nude hero grasping two human-headed bulls [figure 25]. According to Aruz & Wallenfels (2003:106) this image is either related to or represents the deceased. The three lower registers depict the funerary banquet, and this image is associated with these images. Frankfort (1996:75) suggests that because the motif is so common and found in such a wide variety of contexts that the decorative effect was of more importance than its meaning.



Figure 25: Front panel of the Great Lyre.



Figure 26: Front panel of the Queen's Lyre.

The front panel of the Queen's Lyre from Ur is made of lapis lazuli and shell inlay and is divided into four registers. On the upper register the Anzu is depicted grasping two caprids between its claws, two bull-men fighting leopards are shown on the third register, while a bull and a lion are shown fighting in the lowest register [figure 26]. It is a very interesting and notable piece, as it contains such a variety of contest scenes. It demonstrates that different types of contest scenes were in use at the same time, and that their ideologies, if different, were not mutually exclusive.

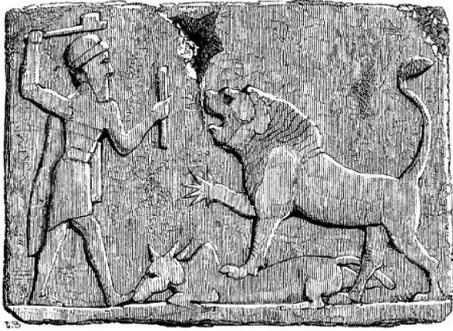


Figure 27: Old Babylonian plaque from Larsa.



Figure 28: Wall plaque from Susa.

Contest scenes were frequently depicted on Mesopotamian baked clay plaques of the second millennium. There are examples of bull-men fighting lions, such as the one from Eshnunna now in the Louvre. A notable Old Babylonian moulded baked clay plaque in the British Museum was found at Larsa<sup>14</sup> and depicts a man attacking a lion which stands above a bull which it has killed [figure 27]. A similar scene is found on a wall plaque, dating to 2700-2340, from the acropolis at Susa. The wall plaque is divided into two registers. A banquet scene is shown on the upper register, while on the lower register a man attacks a lion which has killed a bull [figure 28].

The carved illustration on a limestone wall plaque found in a large open court immediately behind the sanctuaries at Nippur is unusual in that it contains no clear division between registers. The decoration appears around the centre hole. In the upper part, above the centre hole, a hero dressed in a fringed skirt grasps two lions by the ear. The bodies of the two lions are depicted on either side of the centre hole. Below the centre hole two bulls stand on either side of a plant or tree [figure 29] (Hansen 1963:154). This suggests a variation on the theme of the hero protecting the bulls. In this instance, because the bulls are shown away from the combat, it appears as if the hero has fulfilled his duty of protecting them.

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<sup>14</sup>Larsa was the capital of an important kingdom of the second millennium. It is situated about twenty kilometres southeast of Uruk in southern Mesopotamia.



Figure 29: Limestone plaque from Nippur.

In Mesopotamia it appears that animal contest scenes were more popular in the early periods, while mythological scenes gained dominance during the later periods. However, both types of contest scene are represented in a variety of media during all periods. The earliest representations of the contest scene are the seals and vessels from the Jemdet Nasr and Uruk periods. The seals depict animal contest scenes, while the vessels depict both types of contest scene. Mythological contest scenes became more popular during the second millennium and first half of the first millennium. By the Persian Period the animal contest scene again appears to have achieved supremacy as the lion was depicted attacking the bull at the capital city of Persepolis.

The most popular type of animal contest scene is that in which the lion and bull fight. A variation of the animal contest scene is the representations of the Anzu bird attacking the bull or human-headed bull.

The contest scenes depicted on the front panel of the Queen's Lyre from Ur demonstrate that the animal contest scene and the mythological contest scene do not present ideologies which are mutually exclusive. Rather, they represent variations in the portrayal of the same concept. The earliest depictions show domesticated animals being attacked by wild animals, and appear to symbolise the harsh realities which the earliest communities had to face. Then, when the hero

was depicted defending his livestock, a desire to control the chaotic forces of nature would be being depicted. This interpretation, however, can not explain all contest scenes, because the depictions from Persepolis represent a display of power. There is therefore not one single meaning behind contest scenes.

#### 4. THE LEVANT

Outside Mesopotamia scenes depicting animal conflict appear to be more common than the contest scenes which include the anthropomorphic figures. A gold plaque from the Late Bronze Age Levant, dating to the fourteenth or thirteenth century and now housed in the Louvre, contains two animal combat scenes [figure 30]. In one, a griffin attacks a cheetah. In the other a lion attacks a bull. The bull is shown above the lion, perhaps meaning that the lion has thrown it into the air (Aruz *et al* 2008:405). It is also possible that the bull is not above the lion, but on the other side of it to the viewer.



Figure 30: Gold plaque.



Figure 31: Ivory plaque from the tomb of Ahiiram.

An ivory plaque was found in the shaft of the tomb of Ahiiram in the Royal Necropolis of Byblos dating to the thirteenth century. The plaque adorned a rectangular box or a piece of furniture and dates to the Late Bronze Age, during the thirteenth century. A bull is shown being attacked by a griffin and a lion [figure 31]. It may have been manufactured on Cyprus (Aruz *et al* 2008:411).



Figure 32: Bull-attacking-lion motif on a Canaanite seal.

The bull-attacking-lion motif is an unusual one, peculiar to northern Syria [figure 32]. According to Keel and Uehlinger (1998:144-5), the fact that the bull is the aggressor suggests that the motif does not represent a normal, natural fight between the animals. They posit that the conflict represents that of two divinities, most likely Baal, represented by the bull, and Mot, represented by the lion. Strawn (2005:91-2), however, points out that Keel and Uehlinger provide no supporting evidence for their hypothesis, although he does not dismiss the possibility of the motif representing a divine battle. He suggests that the bull may represent a deity, while the lion represents “threat and chaos in general, not an epitome of a particular deity.” It is, however, also possible that the bull-attacking-lion motif represents a naturalistic, albeit unusual, depiction.

Other than depictions on cylinder seals, there are few examples of depictions of contest scenes from the Levant. These are limited to animal contest scenes dating from the second half of the second millennium. A motif unique to the area is that of the bull-attacking-lion. Because of the unusual nature of this motif, it is thought that it symbolises a divine battle, perhaps between Baal and Mot, but more likely between Baal and the forces of chaos.

## 5. ANATOLIA

A carved orthostat from Alaçahöyük depicts a lion with a calf beneath its forepaws. This piece is carved in a combination of relief sculpture and sculpture

in the round, and functioned as a gateway guardian<sup>15</sup> [figure 33].



Figure 33: Sculpture of a lion with a calf between its forepaws from Alaçahöyük.

The orthostats decorating the Herald's Wall at Carchemish, an important ancient city on the west bank of the Euphrates River on the Turkish side of the modern border with Syria, depict a variety of contest scenes. These orthostats date to 950-850. In one, a hero grasps the hind legs of a lion in one hand, and the horn of a bull in the other hand [figure 34]. A deer and two other animals are also in the scene. A second orthostat depicts a winged bull being attacked by two figures [figure 35]. One of these is human, while the second appears to be a winged scorpion-man. Perhaps significantly, the scorpion-man was, like the bull-man and the *lahmu*, one of Tiamat's creatures in the *Enûma Elish*. An orthostat from the Water Gate at the same site depicts a lion attacking a bull from behind.



Figure 34: Orthostat from the Herald's Wall at Carchemish.



Figure 35: Second orthostat from the Herald's Wall at Carchemish

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<sup>15</sup>See *Chapter 11: The Bull and Composite Bull Figures as Protective Beings* for more information on gateway guardians.

An orthostat from Karatepe, an eighth century Hittite fortress in the Taurus Mountains in southern Turkey, shows a hero fighting two lions at the same time [figure 36]. He stands between the lions which stand on their hind legs, and grasps them by their paws. In another orthostat from the same site, a warrior fights a lion in hand-to-hand combat while a man mounted on a horse approaches from behind the lion [figure 37]. It is possible that the bull is implicit in the scenes from Karatepe, much like it was in the Neo-Babylonian cylinder seals.



Figure 36: Orthostat from Karatepe.



Figure 37: Second Orthostat from Karatepe.

Depictions of contest scenes were not restricted to monumental representations. The rim of an Urartian pottery jar from Toprakkale<sup>16</sup> now in the British Museum is decorated with a lion climbing towards a bull [figure 38]. While the beasts are not involved in actual combat, this is clearly a form of lion-bull conflict, with the lion stalking the bull before attacking it.



Figure 38: Jar rim from Toprakkale.



Figure 39: Small wooden sculpture from Gordion.

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<sup>16</sup>Toprakkale was a great fortress in southeastern Turkey and was the last capital of the Urartian empire.

A small wooden sculpture from Tumulus P at Gordion, the capital city of the kingdom of Phrygian western Anatolia, and now in the Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, depicts a lion attacking a bull [figure 39]. The two animals are beside each other, and the lion rears and attacks the bull from behind, a three-dimensional version of the common two-dimensional pose.

The first coins in the ancient Near East appear in western Anatolia in the first half of the sixth century. Among the earliest coins are silver and gold coins with the foreparts of a lion and a bull confronting each other which date to the second half of the sixth century [figure 40] (Boardman 1998:2). They are traditionally associated with Croesus of Lydia, although there is no evidence for this (Bienkowski & Millard 2000:77).



Figure 40: Gold coin from Persia.

Both animal contest scenes and mythological contest scenes are known from Anatolia, although the mythological contest scenes appear to be restricted to depictions on cylinder seals and on orthostats from Carchemish. The animal contest scenes consisted almost exclusively of lion-bull combat.

## 6. EGYPT

Animal contest scenes date to the earliest periods of Egyptian art. The Predynastic Period Oxford Palette<sup>17</sup> is decorated on both sides with animals fighting each other. Most of the creatures are from the natural world and include the lion,

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<sup>17</sup>Also known as the Hierakonpolis, Little Hierakonpolis, Two Dogs, or Ashmolean Palette.

leopard, bull, and various types of antelope, but mythical creatures such as the griffon and serpopard<sup>18</sup> also take part in the conflict [figure 41].



Figure 41: The Oxford Palette (detail).



Figure 42: Gebel el-Arak knife handle (detail).

The Gebel el-Arak Knife dates from the Naqada Period and is now in the Louvre. The ivory handle of the dagger is decorated in relief on one side with a scene of war, on the other side with a scene of animal combat which includes lions, dogs and a variety of deer and goats. At the top of the animal combat scene, a human figure holds two rearing lions around their necks. Towards the bottom a lion attacks another animal [figure 42]. Although the knife handle is damaged, making definite identification impossible, what remains of this animal, as well as the tradition of lion-bull combat, suggest that it represents a bull.

Although produced throughout Dynastic Egypt, the animal contest scene seems to have been a favourite motif during the Eighteenth Dynasty. The blade of a gold dagger from the Tomb of the Eighteenth Dynasty queen Ahhotep at Thebes had a strip of black down its centre, on which gold wire figures and hieroglyphs were overlaid. One side bore an inscription and a pattern, on the other a lion chased a bull, both animals in a flying gallop [figure 43]. The handle of the dagger had curving ends in the form of a bull's head (Aruz et al 2008:121).

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<sup>18</sup>The serpopard was a creature with the body of a leopard or lion with long, serpentine neck which was common to both early Egyptian and Mesopotamian iconography.



Figure 43: Dagger from the tomb of Ahhotep (detail)

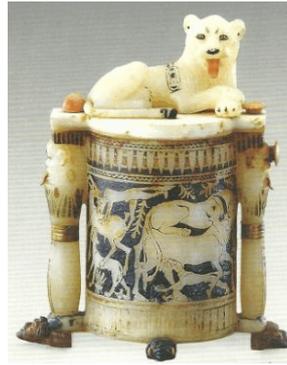


Figure 44: Pyxis from Tutankhamun's tomb.

A gold plaque from the Antechamber of Tutankhamun's tomb shows a bull being attacked from below by a lion and from above by a leopard (James 2007:256). A calcite pyxis from the tomb was decorated with animal conflict in which, amongst others, a lion and a dog attack a bull [figure 44] (Aruz et al 2008:417). A raised relief design of an animal fight involving cattle, lions, dogs and caprids decorated a dagger sheath from Tutankhamun's tomb (Bongioanni & Croce 2003:314-5).

It was not only ceremonial items of royalty which had the motif of animal conflict. An ivory cosmetic spoon was carved so that the lion formed the handle, while the oval bowl was formed by the bull [figure 45]. The decoration of a carved, inlaid wood box which is now housed in the Museum of Cairo was divided into three sections [figure 46]. The outer sections showed a cow suckling her calf, while in the middle section two bulls were attacked by two lions. A cylindrical box now housed in the Louvre contains a depiction of two dogs attacking a calf on one side. On the other side of this box a lion carries off a calf in its mouth while a cow looks on.



Figure 45: Cosmetic spoon.

A red jasper composition of a lion attacking a bull was found at Amarna, and is now in the British Museum [figure 47]. It may have functioned as a weight or as the lid of a cosmetic jar. The lion wears a harness, suggesting that this depicts a fight in an arena (Frankfort 1996:272). The lion has pinned the bull to the ground and is sinking its teeth into the bull's neck. Although found at Amarna, the piece does not appear to be of Egyptian origin. Hall (1925:160-1) suggests that the piece is from Syria and that it has a Minoan influence.



Figure 46: Inlaid wooden box (detail).



Figure 47: Red jasper composition.

Although there are numerous examples of animal contest scenes from Egypt, no mythological contest scenes are known. During the Predynastic Period the animal contest scene decorated some ceremonial objects, such as the Oxford Palette and the Gebel el-Arak knife handle. The motif was used throughout the Pharaonic Period, but appears to have been particularly popular during the Eighteenth Dynasty when it is found on objects of as diverse function as the dagger from Ahhotep's tomb and the red jasper composition. The earliest examples of the motif may have some symbolic meaning, but those from later periods seem to be purely decorative. Animal contest scenes were found decorating a variety of objects, and were not restricted to the ceremonial art of the pharaohs, although all objects appear to have been luxury items.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

Although contest scenes were portrayed in the art and iconography at all times and in all areas of the ancient Near East, there were differences in these depictions. In Mesopotamia, contest scenes were most commonly depicted on cylinder seals. In the earliest periods, only animal contest scenes were produced. Contest scenes including mythical anthropomorphic figures became more common, until they completely replaced animal contest scenes. Animal contest scenes were more common in Egypt, the Levant and Anatolia than the contest scenes which include anthropomorphic figures. In animal contest scenes in which the bull is the victim, this bull represents the domestic bull because the wild bull was in all cases depicted as a powerful creature.

The front panel of the Queen's Lyre from the Royal Burials at Ur reveals that the animal contest scene and the mythological contest scene were not mutually exclusive in ideology, and depicted the same concept. The meaning of these contest scenes is difficult to ascertain. The bull-man and *lahmu* were included in a list of creatures created by Tiamat in the *Enûma Elish*. If these creatures were assembled together to explain their existence in earlier art, their origin, and therefore the origin of contest scenes, was lost already by the Old Babylonian Period. Contest scenes therefore must have had different meanings to different peoples at different times. It is possible then that the lion-bull combat depictions at Persepolis did have astrological connotations, even though this interpretation does not apply to any other contest scene. It is more likely though that the motif functioned at Persepolis as an expression of royal power.

Although it is possible that contest scenes represented a myth which is now lost to us, this seems very unlikely. The variety of combatants is too diverse. Also, although depictions of some myths, such as the story of *Etana*, have been found on cylinder seals, these are rather rare. Contest scenes are so prevalent in the cylinder seal repertoire, that if they depicted a myth, that myth must have been exceedingly popular and well-known. It seems implausible that we have no extant

written version of such a myth. It is possible that some contest scenes, such as those from Syria with the bull-attacking-lion motif, represent a fight amongst divinities, or between a god and the forces of chaos. The earliest examples of contest scenes represent the struggle between domesticated and wild animals. In this case the domesticated animals like the bull would have represented the stability of urbanised life, while the lion would have represented the forces which sought to disrupt that order. As empires grew, the forces of chaos came to represent the foreign powers which sought to overcome the state. What is interesting is that the bull, which had represented domesticated life in early times and had to be defended against the lion, was later supplanted as symbol of the state by that lion. Where the Mesopotamian empires chose to represent the lion as the victor, it may be highly significant that the Syrian motif had the bull conquering the lion. This may then represent an early form of protest art, in which the people of the Canaanite area chose to represent the lion vanquishing the bull, using the symbols of Mesopotamian iconography to put forward their own beliefs and desires. This, however, can not explain the early Mesopotamian depictions of the bull defeating the lion.

Perhaps the best interpretation of the contest scene is that it had more than one meaning. It could have represented struggles in general, and, if this is the case, it would have meant something different to every person of the ancient Near East.

## **SECTION B: THE BULL AND ROYAL IDEOLOGY**

### **CHAPTER 4: THE KING AND THE BULL**

*The bull was a symbol of unrivalled strength, and rulers from across the ancient Near East chose to associate or identify themselves with it. This connection was manifested in art only in Egypt, but textual examples from Mesopotamia, Hittite Anatolia and from the Israelite texts in the Bible, as well as from Egypt itself, can explain and support the association between the king and the bull.*

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The bull was an important and obvious symbols of strength and martial power - characteristics with which any king would wish to be identified. Ancient Near Eastern rulers therefore attempted to associate themselves with the bull.

The importance of bulls in early ancient Near Eastern thought may harken back to a prehistoric cattle-herding lifestyle from which early civilizations developed (Wilkinson 2005:45). Because the bull was such a powerful symbol of strength, it is natural that the ruler would wish to identify himself with the bull, and with this characteristic of the bull. This association is found explicitly in Egyptian iconography from the late Predynastic Period and implicitly throughout the Pharaonic Period. Although the association and identification of the king with the bull is found only in texts and not in the iconography of Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant, these texts provide insight into the choice of the bull as a manifestation of the king.

#### **2. EGYPT**

The Egyptian pharaoh was associated with several animals, including the sphinx and griffin, and, more popularly, the lion and bull (Hornung 1995:1714). In early depictions the pharaoh is particularly associated with the bull.

## 2.1 Depictions of the King as a Bull

### 2.1.1 *Predynastic Cosmetic Palettes*

Several palettes have been found in predynastic assemblages. Originally used to grind and apply cosmetics for the face or body, by the end of the Predynastic Period they had lost this primary function and had taken on a commemorative, ornamental and ceremonial function. They were probably dedicated in temples as offerings of thanks for the military victories alluded to in the imagery, and were concerned with the all-conquering might of the supreme ruler (Aldred 1987:79). Many of the palettes were found at Hierakonpolis and Abydos, centres of power in predynastic Upper Egypt. They disappear from tomb assemblages after the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt at the end of the fourth millennium.

Only a fragment of the Bull Palette survives. This piece is about 25cm high and is now housed in the Louvre. At the top of both sides of the palette a bull is shown overpowering and trampling on a warrior representing a Libyan [figure 1] (Aldred 1987:80). Only half of the palette survives, but a second bull most likely faced the first. The bull represents the ruler, and the iconography on the rest of the palette demonstrates this ruler's strength and conquering might. Below the bull, on the obverse of the palette, two fortified towns are shown, and the missing part of the palette probably contained more such depictions. These symbolised towns captured by the triumphant bull, symbolising the king, above them.



Figure 1: The Bull Palette (detail).



Figure 2: The lowest register of the obverse of the Narmer Palette

The Pharaoh-as-a-bull motif also occurs on the Narmer Palette [figure 2]. This palette is arguably the most famous predynastic Egyptian artefact, and is now in the Egyptian Museum

in Cairo<sup>19</sup>. It is a large, shield-shaped, ceremonial palette made of flat, soft green siltstone with both sides carved in raised relief. In the bottom register of the obverse of the palette, Narmer is depicted as a bull knocking down the walls of a fortified city and trampling on a naked, bearded man, probably the city's fallen chieftain (Aldred 1987:82-3). The pose of this bull is almost identical to that of the bull on the Bull Palette.

### 2.1.2 *Bovine Heads on the Narmer Palette*

At the top of both sides of the Narmer Palette, two human-faced bovines flank a rectangular panel, representing a *serekh*<sup>20</sup>, which bears two hieroglyphs which give Narmer's name [figure 3] (Hobson 2002:55). These heads are traditionally thought to represent either the cow goddess Bat, the patron deity of the seventh nome<sup>21</sup> of Upper Egypt, or Hathor, the parallel goddess from Lower Egypt with whom Bat was linked and by whom Bat was later supplanted<sup>22</sup>. Fairservis (1991:7) argues against the bovine heads representing either Bat or Hathor. Instead, he proposes that they depict a bull, and are meant to represent and emphasise the strength and power of Narmer himself. There are two problems with this interpretation. The first is that other depictions of this head are known from contexts which do not appear to be related to Narmer or to kingship<sup>23</sup>. The second problem is that four such bovine heads are found on the king's apron on the reverse of the Narmer Palette. Aprons with Bat or Hathor elements are known from art throughout the Dynastic Period, one example being found on the fragments of the statue found in the entrance colonnade at Saqqara (Patch 1995:97). These would have had a protective function, and it is unlikely that pharaohs would have worn such protective amulets

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<sup>19</sup>The Narmer Palette is an important document from the close of the Predynastic Period. It is traditionally thought to depict the subjugation of the Delta and the unification of Upper and Lower Egypt under Narmer (Mark 1997:88), but, according to Bongioanni and Croce (2003:28), the unification of Egypt probably took place before Narmer's rule and the palette represents only a military victory over an area in the Delta.

<sup>20</sup>In Egyptian hieroglyphs a *serekh* is a rectangular enclosure which represented a niched or gated palace facade which contained a text within. The *serekh* was often surmounted by a falcon, symbolising the god Horus, which indicated that the text represented a royal name.

<sup>21</sup>Ancient Egypt was divided into 42 nomes, each ruled by a nomarch who served as a provincial governor.

<sup>22</sup>Bat and Hathor, as well as which of these goddesses may be represented on the Narmer Palette are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses*.

<sup>23</sup>These depictions are discussed in *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses*.

depicting themselves when the protection they sought came from the gods.



Figure 3: The bovine heads at the top of the reverse of the Narmer Palette.

The focus in studies is usually on the iconography of the rest of the palette<sup>24</sup>, with only a few lines being devoted to the meaning of this symbol. Its reading, however, is important because the symbol changes depending upon which interpretation is followed. If the bovine heads depict a goddess, these symbols portray the fact that she watches over the king, and offers him protection (Friedman 1995:3). If, on the other hand, the bovine heads represent Narmer himself, then the emphasis is squarely on his power and authority.

### 2.1.3 *Dynastic Period Depictions of the King as a Bull*

In predynastic times the king was represented on commemorative palettes as a bull. This animal perfectly represented the fertility and wild ferocity with which the ruler wished to be associated. According to Wilkinson (2000:28), after the reign of Narmer the king was never represented in a purely animal form again. But this is incorrect, as Amenhotep III depicted himself on a series of scarabs as a bull trampling an enemy [figure 4] (Hornung 1995:1727). In addition to this, according to Galan (1994:81), fights between bulls depicted on the walls of local chiefs' tombs from the Sixth until Eighteenth Dynasties did not merely represent a scene from daily life but were symbolic. The deceased is identified with a bull which has to defend its territory and status against a challenge from another leader. This symbolism was also found in literature and in royal inscriptions.

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<sup>24</sup>For an example of such a discussion, see Mark 1997:88-121.



Figure 4: Amenhotep III scarab.

## 2.2 The Use of the Bull's Tail to Denote Kingship

Soon after the establishment of the Egyptian state the iconography of kingship underwent a consolidation and codification. During this time some of the motifs used during the late Predynastic Period were done away with (Wilkinson 1999:190). The animal potency of kingship remained important ideologically, but was expressed in more subtle ways. The power of the bull was expressed throughout the Dynastic Period by the use of a bull's tail, hanging down from the back of the pharaoh's *schendyt*, or short, narrow loincloth. This became standard royal regalia (Faulkner, Von Dassow, Andrews, Goelet & Wasserman 2008:156) and was used from the late Predynastic Period until the very end of the Dynastic Period.

The bull's tail was used as a mark of kingship as early as the Narmer Palette and the Scorpion King Macehead, two of the earliest ceremonial Egyptian artefacts. In the Upper register of the obverse of the Narmer Palette, Narmer is shown with several kingly attributes which would typify representations of pharaohs throughout Dynastic Egypt. He wears the Red Crown of Lower Egypt and a ceremonial fake beard. He holds the mace and flail, two traditional symbols of kingship. From his royal *schendyt* hangs a symbolic bull's tail [figure 5]. The reverse of the Narmer Palette is dominated by a large figure of Narmer, his depiction similar to that on the obverse. He wears the White Crown of Upper Egypt and smites an enemy with a mace. He is again shown with the bull's tail hanging from the back of his *schendyt*.

The King Scorpion Macehead was found in the main deposit in the temple of Horus at Hierakonpolis and is now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. It is made of limestone with relief work showing the king standing alongside a body of water, performing an irrigation ritual (Manley 2003:30). It is attributed to King Scorpion because of a glyph of a scorpion engraved next to the king. King Scorpion wears the White Crown of Upper Egypt and has a bull's tail

hanging down from the back of his *schendyt* [figure 6].



Figure 5: Narmer from the obverse of the Narmer Palette.



Figure 6: King Scorpion from the Scorpion Macehead.

In these early depictions the bull's tail is depicted as quite thick, and individual hairs are visible. In later depictions the rendering of this bull's tail changes, and it is rather stylised, being a long thin line hanging down from the back of the pharaoh's *schendyt*. This development is already apparent in the art of the First Dynasty. An ivory label from the reign of Den depicts the king smiting a foe using a mace and flail [figure 7]. He wears an archaic version of the royal headcloth with a uraeus cobra, and a bull's tail hangs from his *schendyt*. On the reverse of the label is etched a pair of sandals, indicating that the label was attached to this type of object. This demonstrates that the use of the bull's tail was not restricted to ceremonial objects, but also occurred on more mundane objects.



Figure 7: Ivory label from the reign of Den.

The bull's tail is most easily seen in relief sculpture, but it appears also in sculpture in the round. It is most commonly seen in seated statues, where it hangs down between the pharaoh's legs. The bull's tail of the limestone seated statue of Amenemhat III from the Eleventh Dynasty [figure 8] has the hairs separated into tiers, whereas the bull's tail of the seated statue of Thutmose IV with his mother Tia [figure 9], from the Eighteenth Dynasty, is thin and unembellished. On standing sculptures, a bull's tail is moulded onto the back of the right leg of the beaten copper statue of Pepy I, now in the Cairo Museum.



Figure 8: Statue of Amenemhat III.



Figure 9: Statue of Thutmose IV and Tia.

The bull's tail was used in royal iconography not only for indigenous Egyptian pharaohs, but also for kings of foreign lands which had dominion over Egypt. A depiction in the temple at Hibis, dating to when Egypt was under Persian dominion, shows Darius I of Persia as a pharaoh making offerings to the gods of Egypt [figure 10]. He wears a short loincloth and the crown of Upper Egypt and has the bull's tail (Strudwick 2006:95).



Figure 10: Relief of Darius at Hibis.

### 2.3 The Sed Festival

The king was not only represented as a bull or with bovine attributes, but was also associated with the bull through the *Sed* festival, one of the oldest royal rituals. This was a royal jubilee festival, officially celebrated after 30 years of a king's rule<sup>25</sup>, and every third year thereafter (Wenke 2009:276), which involved the king running a course<sup>26</sup>. The king's ability to run this course demonstrated his continued strength and vitality, proving his ability to rule<sup>27</sup>, and renewed his royal powers (Wenke 2009:276). The Apis Bull played a key role in the festival, accompanying the king as he ran the course.

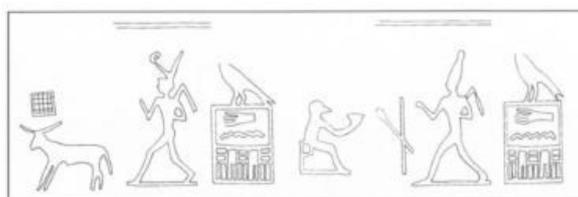


Figure 11: Seal impression showing Den running the *Sed* course with the Apis Bull.

A small ebony label from the reign of Den in the first century, showing a tiny figure of the king running around a clearly defined course carrying his royal insignia, is generally taken to constitute the earliest evidence for the ritual. A cylinder seal from the tomb of Hemaka, an official during the reign of Den, shows the king running the *Sed* course, this time before the Apis bull [figure 11] (Friedman 1995:32). Manley (2003:251) and Oakes and Gahlin (2004:92) believe that the king running with the Apis Bull was a constant aspect of the festival. In a relief from Hatshepsut's Red Chapel dating to about a millennium and a half after Den's reign, Hatshepsut is shown running the course accompanied by the Apis Bull [figure 12]. The *Sed*

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<sup>25</sup>Although some kings are known to have celebrated the festival before their thirtieth year (Leprohon 1995:278; Oakes & Gahlin 2004:92).

<sup>26</sup>The *Sed* festival courtyard in the funerary complex of the Step Pyramid at Saqqara was built for this purpose during the reign of Djoser.

<sup>27</sup>According to Hobson (2002:66) the word "*sed*" means "to slay" or "to slaughter", and this reflects that in predynastic times the king was killed and replaced if he failed to run the course. Leprohon (1995:278) refutes this theory, pointing out that there is no evidence to support it.

festival therefore provides one of the oldest and longest surviving illustrations of the relationship between not just the pharaoh and the gods, but between the pharaoh and the bull.



Figure 12: Relief from the Red Chapel showing Hatshepsut running the *Sed* course with the Apis Bull.

## 2.4 The Tarkhan Seal Impression

A seal impression, dating to the reign of Narmer, and found in Grave 414 at Tarkhan bears a depiction of a building facade surmounted by a bull's head and surrounded by crocodiles<sup>28</sup> [figure 13]. A crocodile on a standard next to the building is associated with Sobek, the sacred crocodile of the Fayum Province (Petrie, Wainwright & Gardiner 1913:22). Wilkinson (1999:295) believes that the building facade represents a shrine dedicated to this god. A different interpretation is that the facade doesn't represent a temple, but a *serekh* belonging to a ruler called Horus Crocodile (O'Brien 1996:132).

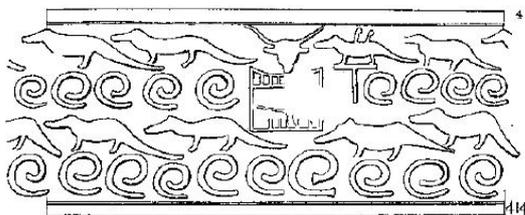


Figure 13: Tarkhan seal impression.

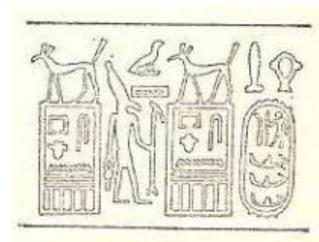


Figure 14: *Serekh* of Peribsen.

<sup>28</sup>This seal impression is also discussed in *Chapter 1: Bucrania*.

In most cases the *serekh* was surmounted by a falcon, representing Horus and the pharaoh's special association with this god. But as Wilkinson (1999:201) notes, "the earliest *serekhs* were empty, the symbol alone conveying the necessary message of royal power." In addition, *serekhs* were not surmounted exclusively by Horus. The Second Dynasty pharaoh Peribsen's *serekh* was surmounted by the Seth animal [figure 14], and the *serekh* of his successor, Khasekhemwy, was surmounted by both the Horus falcon and the Seth animal<sup>29</sup> (Najovits 2003:164K). Narmer clearly equated himself with the bull on his famous palette, and therefore the bull was a sign of kingship during his reign<sup>30</sup>. It is therefore possible that the image on the Tarkan seal impression represents a *serekh* surmounted by a bull which denoted the kingship of this ruler.

The pharaoh was seen as a manifestation of Horus, who usually surmounted the *serekh*, and the king therefore claimed his power through Horus. While Peribsen and Khasekhemwy were on the throne that power was also seen to come from Seth. If the Tarkhan seal impression does represent a *serekh* surmounted by a bull's head, it is notable that the pharaoh Horus Crocodile would have claimed his kingship through the power of the bull.

## 2.5 Epithets

Another way in which the bull was associated with the king was in the king's name and in epithets. There is debate as to whether the Scorpion symbol on the Scorpion King Macehead denotes the ruler's name, or whether it is a title, as the scorpion was an obvious metaphor of royal power during the late Predynastic Period (Manley 2003:30). In a similar manner, the bull was used to describe the pharaoh in later times. Inscriptions on Ramses III's mortuary temple at Medinet Habu report that this pharaoh, as a bull, punished the people of Asia (Kyle 2007:33).

The Egyptians referred to themselves in texts as "the cattle of god" (Schwabe & Gordon 1988:89), and their king, the leader of this "herd", frequently bore epithets such as 'Mighty Bull',

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<sup>29</sup>Khasekhemwy's name means "In him the Two Powers are reconciled", and Rice (2003b:100) contends that the use of the images of these two gods reflects a social struggle between two factions which were represented by these gods. During the reign of Peribsen the supporters of Seth rose to power, and Khasekhemwy reconciled the two factions.

<sup>30</sup>Indeed, Miller (1967:424) believes the bull on the Bull Palette to represent Narmer on the basis of its similarity in depiction and iconography to the Narmer Palette.

‘Victorious Bull’ or ‘Strong Bull’. Every New Kingdom ruler from Thutmose I on, except for Hatshepsut, used ‘Mighty Bull’ as an epithet in their Horus name<sup>31</sup> (Bell 1985:259). The ‘Annals’ of Thutmose III, which were carved onto the walls of the Temple of Karnak, begin, “The Horus: Mighty Bull, Appearing in Thebes;...(Thut-mose III)” (Pritchard Volume I 1973:175). Amenhotep III was “The Mighty Bull, Who Appears in Truth” (Bell 1985:267).

The pharaoh was associated with or identified as the bull in both iconographic and textual sources. At the end of the Predynastic Period and beginning of the Early Dynastic Period the pharaoh was depicted on ceremonial palettes as a bull trampling his enemies. In the New Kingdom Amenhotep III also depicted himself on a series of scarabs as a bull trampling his foes. In these depictions the pharaoh symbolically embodied the martial power of the bull. Dynastic Period examples of this pose are rare. Instead, the convention during the Dynastic Period was for the pharaoh to be depicted with the tail of the bull. During the Dynastic Period, particularly the New Kingdom, many pharaohs were identified with the power of the bull through their Horus Names in a textual reflection of the ancient iconographic motif.

The king was also associated with the bull through the *Sed* festival, in which he ran a course accompanied by the Apis Bull. Although this represents an association between kingship and the gods, it also reflects an ancient connection between the kingship and the bull. This connection may also be found on the seal impression from Tarkhan, in which the bull represents the power of the king.

### 3. MESOPOTAMIA

Egyptian pharaohs are the only rulers of the ancient Near East who were associated or identified with the bull in art and iconographic sources. There are rare textual examples, mostly from the third and early second millennia, of this association from other areas which may be used to

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<sup>31</sup>The Horus name was the primary title of the Egyptian pharaoh. It was adopted by the king on his accession and was subsequently used throughout, and after, his reign. The name ‘Horus name’ derives from the fact that it comprised three elements; an epithet which was written in a serekh and surmounted by a falcon which represented Horus (Wilkinson 1999:201).

support or explain this connection.

There are frequent references in the Mesopotamian texts of the earlier periods to kings being represented as bulls. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh is often likened to a bull or described as a bull. In Tablet I he is described as “Surpassing all other kings, heroic in stature, brave scion of Uruk, wild bull on the rampage,” and as the “Wild bull of Lugalanda, Gilgamesh, the perfect strength” (George 2003:2). In Tablet IV Gilgamesh has a dream during his journey to the Cedar Forest. Enkidu interprets Gilgamesh’s dream as symbolising Gilgamesh’s upcoming battle with Humbaba, and tells Gilgamesh that “locking horns like a bull you will batter him, and force his head down with your strength” (George 2003:34). In these passages his characteristics which are likened to those of a bull are his strength and ferocity. This association is also found in earlier Sumerian texts recounting the tales of Gilgamesh, here appearing as Bilgames. *The Death of Bilgames*: “The great wild bull is lying down” mourns the death of this hero. While the body of the text details the events surrounding his death, the opening lines praise the king, manifested as ‘the great bull’, and stress his strength and power;

“The great bull is lying down, never to rise again,  
the lord Bilgames is lying down, never to rise again,  
he who was perfect in combat is lying down, never to rise again,  
the warrior girt with a shoulder-belt is lying down, never to rise again,  
he who was perfect in strength is lying down, never to rise again,  
he who diminished the wicked is lying down, never to rise again...”

(George 2003:197).

Gilgamesh was a legendary Sumerian king. No direct evidence exists that he was an historical person, and it is in mythological texts that he is associated with the bull. Several historical rulers, including Shulgi, the second king of the Third Dynasty of Ur, Ishme-Dagan, the fourth king of the First Dynasty of Isin, and Lipit-Ishtar, Ishme-Dagan’s successor, were also identified as or likened to bulls in texts. *A praise poem of Shulgi (Shulgi C)*, a hymn of self-praise written as if Shulgi himself were speaking, begins: “I am the king, a wild bull of acknowledged strength” (Black, Cunningham, Ebeling, Flückiger-Hawker, Robson, Taylor & Zólyomi 1998-2006). In

*A praise poem to Lipit-Ishtar (Lipit-Ishtar A)*, another hymn of self-praise, the king reports that “I am a wild bull whom nobody dares oppose in its anger. I am a bison, sparkling with beautiful eyes, having a lapis lazuli beard” (Black, Cunningham, Robson & Zólyomi 2006:309). In these texts the rulers manifest themselves as bulls, and especially associate themselves with the strength of the animal.

Like the rulers, some cities were also compared to bulls. In *Enmerkar and the Lord of Aratta* Kulaba<sup>32</sup> is described as “City, majestic bull bearing vigour and great awesome splendour...” The bull therefore symbolised not only the strength and power of the rulers, but also that of the cities, and by extension the areas, over which they ruled.

#### 4. HITTITE ANATOLIA

The only known text from Anatolia in which the king is associated with a bull is the Old Hittite story of the crossing of the Taurus Mountains, dating to the reign of Khattushilli I, which describes Hittite expansion to the south<sup>33</sup>. It recounts how the king wished to attack Aleppo, and a bull used its horns to make a path through the mountains, bending its horns in the process. The story is fragmentary, making interpretation difficult. While Kohlmeyer (1995:2653) describes the bull as simply being a bull, Archi (1995:2371) understands it to be the king, and Collins (1998:17) believes it to be the Storm God. If Archi’s interpretation is correct, this is a rare example from outside Egypt of the king taking on the semblance of a bull in order to combat his foes. If any other understanding is correct, it is still significant that a bull, whether a god in the form of a bull, or simply the animal in its own capacity, comes to the assistance of the Hittite king.

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<sup>32</sup>Kulaba was the cultic area of the city of Uruk, and its name was often used to denote the entire city (Black et al 2006:366).

<sup>33</sup>A second possible association of the king with the bull is the Hittite Substitute Ritual in which the sin or personality of the king was transferred to another being which then had to bear some punishment. The substitute was often a living person, but sometimes a bull was used. The bull in a sense became the king - if only as a proxy which bore the consequences of his sin. However, in these circumstances it was the bull which was believed to embody the sin of the king, and not the king which took on attributes of the bull.

## 5. THE LEVANT

The bull is also associated with the Biblical patriarch Joseph. Deuteronomy 33:17 likens Joseph to a bull, stating that “Joseph has the strength of a bull, the horns of a wild ox.” According to Wiersbe (2007:371), this bull with sharp horns had the power to “defeat every enemy.” This likening of Joseph to a bull is not restricted to this single passage. May (1931:87) renders a part of the *Blessing of Jacob* in Genesis 49:22 as “Joseph is a young bull, a young bull at a spring, a wild-ass at Shur.”

The identification of Joseph with a bovid is extended to Ephraim, his second son by the Egyptian Asenath, who gave his name to one of the twelve Israelite tribes (Miller & Miller 1973:168). When the Israelites marched in the wilderness they were divided into four camps, each distinguished by a large embroidered standard. The standard of Reuben depicted a man, that of Judah depicted a lion, that of Dan represented Cherubim, and that of Ephraim depicted a bull<sup>34</sup>.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

The rulers of the ancient Near East identified and associated themselves with the bull, particularly in the early periods. In late Predynastic Egypt rulers depicted themselves as bulls on ceremonial palettes, symbolically demonstrating their strength and martial prowess to be like that of the bull. With the establishment of the Dynastic Egyptian state this explicit association, with rare exceptions, fell into disuse. The concept remained in the use of the bull’s tail as a mark of kingship and with various epithets, such as ‘Strong Bull’, which were employed by the pharaoh. The bull and its strength were therefore specifically associated with the kingship of the pharaoh.

The king was not only identified as a bull, but was also associated with the bull and with the gods through the Sed festival in which he ran a course while accompanied by the Apis Bull. This can be further illustrated by the Tarkhan seal impression, if this does indeed represent a *serekh* and not a depiction of a temple facade. This piece demonstrates that at least one ruler claimed his

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<sup>34</sup>It should be noted that the appearance of these standards was asserted by later Jewish Rabbins, who founded their statement on passages in Genesis, and that many scholars questioned the authority of such statements as early as the nineteenth century CE, for example, Goodhugh and Taylor (1841:116), and Jahn (1836:321).

power to rule through the strength of the bull.

Iconographic depictions of the king as a bull have been found in Egypt, but not in any other area of the ancient Near East. Examples of the king being associated with the bull are found in early Mesopotamian literary texts, in one Old Hittite text, and in a handful of Biblical references. These references can explain the identification of the king with the bull in iconography, and as such are textual manifestations of the iconographic motif. In all texts, it is the strength of the bull which is emphasised and with which the king or leader is associated. This fits well with the apparent symbolism of the Egyptian depictions. The parallel in the Old Hittite text is particularly striking, as the bull in the text uses its horns to break open the mountain and clear the the path to the enemy, just as the bulls on the Bull Palette and Narmer Palette use their horns to break apart fortifications and to gore the enemy leaders.

In the Mesopotamian, Anatolian and the Levantine texts, the rulers are not consistently compared to or associated with the bull. In Egypt, the Horus name of many pharaohs equated the pharaoh with the bull, and all pharaohs were depicted with a bull's tail attached to their *schendyt*. The identification of the bull with the pharaoh is therefore more continual and consistent amongst pharaohs than among the rulers of any other area of the ancient Near East.

It is clear that ancient Near Eastern rulers identified themselves with the strength and martial powers of the bull and in some cases manifested themselves as the beast. Egypt is the only area in which this association took a visual form in art and iconography. Nonetheless, texts from other areas of the ancient Near East reveal the symbolism behind the use of the bull: it was the strength and martial power of the bull which were particularly admired and with which the king especially chose to be associated.

## **CHAPTER 5: THE ROYAL BULL HUNT**

*Bull hunts served as an expression of royal power, and depictions are found across the ancient Near East. They are most common and most famous from the first and late second millennia. Differences in the way that bull hunts were depicted in the different areas of the ancient Near East reflect subtle differences in the expression of royal power.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The king was identified as a bull to demonstrate his power and his right to rule. Another way in which these characteristics were demonstrated was in his hunting and killing of wild bulls. Because he triumphed over the beasts, his power and strength were demonstrated to be greater than that of the bull.

For the earliest inhabitants of the ancient Near East, hunting would have been a means of acquiring food. With the development of the earliest settled communities, hunting would have acquired the additional function of protecting the community from predators. The leading hunter would have been responsible for confronting beasts, and therefore for defending his community and providing it with meat. Hunting and warfare were related, and a good hunter made a good leader. As the earliest city-states emerged, hunting became a sport of the elite, and a demonstration of their position (Kyle 2007:35).

The lion, a fierce predator, and the bull, a powerful animal, were the animals most often represented in depictions of royal hunts in the ancient Near East. More scholarly attention has generally been given to lion hunts than to bull hunts. The idea that lion hunts were more common than bull hunts may be due to the artefacts which we have recovered, or due to our modern concepts of the lion and the bull. The Asiatic lion was smaller than the African lion which is known today, while the wild bull, or aurochs, was much bigger than domesticated cattle, and could stand two metres at the shoulder (Gordon & Schwabe 2004:35). When this is borne in mind, the bull hunt becomes a more frightening concept, and the ability of the kings to confront and overcome these beasts becomes a much more impressive feat. It is also possible that the depictions of bulls are rarer because wild bulls themselves were rarer than lions at this

time. Lions did not become extinct in what is today known as the Middle East until after the First World War (Bienkowski & Millard 2000:20), while few wild cattle were left in Mesopotamia by Ashurnasirpal II's time (Curtis & Reade 1995:52), and they had died out in Egypt some time after the reign of Amenhotep III (Ikram 1995:13).

Differences are discernible in the depiction of the bull hunt in Anatolia, Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Levant, and these reflect subtle variations in the expression of royal power, offering insight into the way in which ancient Near Eastern rulers wished to present themselves.

## 2. ANATOLIA

### 2.1 Çatalhöyük

Amongst the earliest depictions of the bull contest or bull hunt are those from Çatalhöyük. Frescoes on the plastered walls at the site are the earliest paintings on a man-made surface (Janson & Janson 2003:43). Some of the paintings in the upper levels of the site show groups of people involved in baiting or hunting wild animals. Arguably the most famous of these hunt scenes contains a bull two metres long and painted red [figure 1]. The human figures surrounding the bull wear spotted loincloths, probably of leopard skin, and are armed with bows and throwing-sticks. These figures are much smaller than the bull which they surround, emphasising the bull by contrast (Cauvin 2000:31). The gender of the figures in this composition is uncertain, but on other murals the human figures are all bearded (Hodder 2006:92), and it therefore appears likely that the people involved in the hunt were all men. These hunt scenes may be ceremonial, either as a sport or as an important part of the city's religious celebrations. Along with the bull, the stag is frequently depicted in these hunt scenes. Janson and Janson (2003:43) suggest that these hunts may have been rituals honouring the deity to whom the bull and stag were sacred.

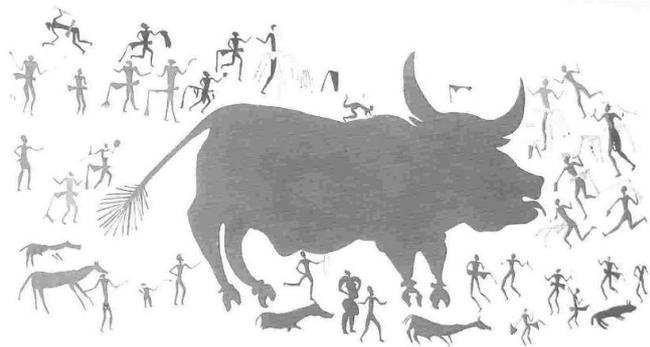


Figure 1: Bull Hunt Scene from Çatalhöyük.

## 2.2 Urartu

The Urartians produced long decorated bronze belts. Some had geometric patterns while others had a rich variety of figural decoration. Scenes of hunting and warfare were a favourite subject for these belts. A small group of graves was discovered at Nor-Aresh. Three cremation burials contained Urartian metal ornamental equipment. Tomb 1 produced a belt with a frieze of a bull hunt from horseback. Fragments of a belt with friezes of bull and lion hunts from chariot and horseback were found in Tomb II [figure 2]. Tomb III had fragments of a bronze belt with friezes of bull hunts (Barnett 1963:194-7).

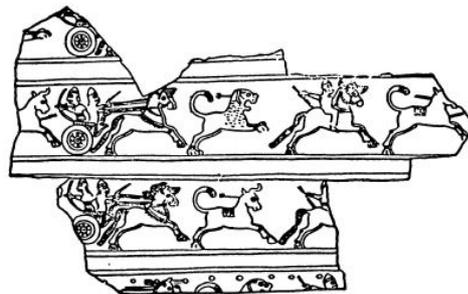


Figure 2: Fragment of an Urartian Belt from Tomb II at Nor-Aresh.

## 2.3 Hittite Anatolia

There is little evidence for bull hunting in Hittite Anatolia. Othostats dating to the Neo-Hittite period from the outer gate of the South Gate of Zincirli, the Syro-Hittite city of Sam'al in present

day southeast Turkey, bear depictions of a hunter, accompanied by a hunting dog, shooting his bow at deer and a lion. Two reliefs, one of a lion hunt and one of a stag hunt, are found at Arslantepe<sup>1</sup> in present day east Turkey. The hunts are conducted from chariots with one hunter shooting a bow while the other holds the reins. Both scenes include hunting dogs. The best evidence for bull hunting comes from Alaçahöyük during the Empire Period, but even this is circumstantial at best. Hunting scenes carved on orthostats from the site include men hunting a lion with a spear, and a boar and a stag with bows and arrows. The exact context of an orthostat from the site, bearing a depiction of a charging bull with its head lowered [figure 3] is uncertain, but it may form part of a larger hunt scene. Presumably if deer and lions were hunted, bulls would have been hunted too, and must have not been represented in the art and iconography. The scarcity of depictions may reflect a scarcity of wild bulls to hunt in the area, although contemporary depictions from Urartu and Assyria<sup>2</sup> make this unlikely. If, similarly to Janson and Janson's hypothesis for the hunts at Çatalhöyük (2003:43), the hunts were rituals honouring deities, it is curious that the bull, which was the animal associated with the Storm God Teshub<sup>3</sup>, the head of the Hurrian and Hittite pantheons, is not shown. A relief from the Southern Gate at Alaçahöyük may explain this. This relief depicts the king and queen conducting a ritual in front of a bull, representing the Storm God, on a pedestal. If the Storm God was envisaged as a bull, it could be considered hubris to depict mortals defeating the animal, and would explain why there are no such depictions in Hittite art.



Figure 3: Orthostat from Alaçahöyük bearing a Relief of a Charging Bull.

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<sup>1</sup>The name 'Arslantepe' means 'hills of the lions', referring to the Lion Gate of the Hittite Period. The Hittite name for the settlement was Melid, a name which lives on in Malatya, the name of both the nearby city and the province of which this city is capital.

<sup>2</sup>Discussed below.

<sup>3</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*.

The earliest iconographic evidence for bull hunting in the ancient Near East comes from Çatalhöyük. Urartian belts contain depictions of bull and lion hunts from chariot and horseback. There is virtually no evidence for bull hunts from Hittite sites, although there is for lion and stag hunts. Bull hunts depicted in Urartian and Hittite iconography are conducted from chariot or from horseback, and hunting dogs accompany the hunters in Hittite art.

### 3. MESOPOTAMIA

The Royal Hunt is one of the most enduring motifs of Assyrian art. Lion hunts appear to have been the most popular representation of the hunt amongst Assyrian kings, with Ashurbanipal's Lion Hunt Reliefs arguably being not only the most famous relief of a royal hunt, but the most famous of all Assyrian reliefs. Although less famous and less prolific than depictions of lion hunts, there are ample examples of bull hunts in Assyrian iconography. The Royal Hunt was reserved for the king and his retinue. It conveyed and affirmed the status and privilege of the elite (Thomason 2005:188-9). Inscriptions accompanying the reliefs describe the terror of tributary kings who were forced to participate in the hunt (Bienkowski & Millard 2000:150). The hunts sometimes took place in a large park where onlookers could watch from the top of a mound while eating their picnics. In this way the king could demonstrate to an audience his domination of nature and of his empire (Thomason 2005:188). Although most recognizably an Assyrian practice, the Royal Hunt can be traced in Mesopotamian art and iconography to the Uruk Period.

#### 3.1 Seals

The only evidence for bull hunts in the early periods of Mesopotamian history comes from cylinder seals. A limestone cylinder seal from the Late Uruk Period, now housed in the British Museum, shows the priest-king shooting at four bulls with a bow and arrow [figure 4]. These bulls are shown in dynamic poses, fleeing from the priest-king. A small gatepost with a streamer, the symbol of the goddess Inanna<sup>4</sup>, separates the ruler from the attendant who stands behind him. The inclusion of the religious iconography indicates that this hunt scene, like most art from this period, was conceived within a religious context (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:23).

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<sup>4</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses*.

Seals depicting hunts continued to be produced into the Persian Period, and seem to have been most common on Neo-Assyrian seals from the ninth and eighth centuries<sup>5</sup> [figure 5] (Mallowan 1957:17). These Assyrian cylinder seals showed a royal bull hunt from a chariot. The religious context evident in earlier seals disappeared during later periods.

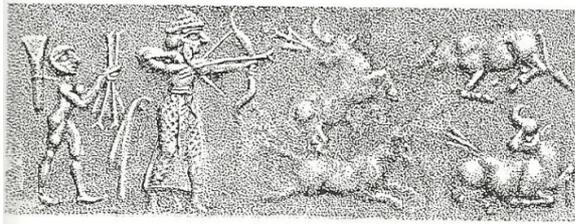


Figure 4: Uruk Period Cylinder Seal Impression.



Figure 5: Assyrian Seal Impression.

### 3.2 The White Obelisk

The earliest known depiction of the hunting of wild animals by an Assyrian ruler are found on the White Obelisk<sup>6</sup>. It was found in the centre of Nineveh, and is now in the British Museum. Three sides of the lowest register show the king hunting a bull [figure 6], ibexes and wild onagers (Albenda 1972:169). These scenes are found together with scenes of the king subduing rebellious cities, giving thanks to Ishtar in her temple at Nineveh, obtaining booty, and being praised by his people (Pittman 1996:339). This recalls the formula in texts such as the *Annals of Tiglath-Pileser I*, dating to the end of the twelfth century during the Middle Assyrian Period. This text contains the earliest written references of an Assyrian king hunting exotic animals. Tiglath-Pileser I claims to have killed “four extraordinarily strong wild virile bulls” (Thomason 2005:188) as well as 10 elephants and 920 lions while on campaign to the west of Assyria (Bienkowski & Millard 2000:149). Brown (1999:355) points out that this account is found between Tiglath-Pileser I’s battle and building reports, immediately before his statement that he

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<sup>5</sup>The iconography of the hunt was so popular and so important that seals with the impression of the king grappling with a rampant lion were used by the Assyrian royal palace administration and are known as ‘royal seals’ (Curtis & Reade 1995:188).

<sup>6</sup>Inscribed Assyrian sculpture is usually easy to date to a specific king’s reign, but the dating of the White Obelisk has proven difficult. The name ‘Ashurnasirpal’ is mentioned in the text, and it has been dated to both the reign of Ashurnasirpal I (1049-1031) and Ashurnasirpal II (883-859) due to stylistic considerations of the sculpture. See Reade 1975 for a discussion on the dating of the White Obelisk.

gained “complete dominion over the enemies of Assur”. He argues that this implies some kind of association between the wild animals and the king’s enemies. The king had to defend his realm against forces of chaos, whether those were hostile human enemies or wild beasts. Similar to the references in the *Annals of Tiglath-Pileser I*, the depiction of the hunt on the White Obelisk is shown amongst other events in the king’s reign, suggesting that it was as important an event as the king defeating his enemies or fulfilling his cultic responsibilities.



Figure 6: The Bull Hunt Scene from the White Obelisk.

More than a millennium before the reign of Tiglath-Pileser, an inscription from the reign of Naram-Sin of Akkad informs us that “Naram-Sīn, king of the four (world’s) quarters, when he had smitten Huršamat and he himself had killed a wild bull in the middle of the mountain of Dibar...” (Lipiński 2000:28). Naram-Sin therefore also included hunts amongst the significant events of his reign. That these hunts occurred during the Akkadian Period suggests a continuation of the tradition from the Uruk Period until the Assyrian Period.

### 3.3 Assyrian Palace Reliefs

Ashurnasirpal II’s bull and lion hunts were carved in relief to decorate his palace. They were originally placed in his throne room, probably because they depicted exploits of which the king was particularly proud (Reade 1998:39). They were divided into two registers, with the hunt being depicted on the upper register [figure 7], and the king’s celebrations over the dead bodies on the lower register [figure 8]. These were separated by a standard inscription which ran across all of the reliefs of the palace. In the hunt scene, Ashurnasirpal II, distinguishable by his royal hat, rides in a chariot and stabs a bull which has charged the chariot from behind. He holds the

bull's horn while driving his sword into its neck. Next to the king stands an attendant who holds the reins and steers the horses. An armed horseman rides behind the chariot, leading a mount for the king (Curtis & Reade 1995:52). The lower register shows Ashurnasirpal II, surrounded by attendants, pouring a libation over a bull which lies dead at his feet. The purpose of the hunts was therefore not only to show the king's prowess, but also to demonstrate his protective powers. The religious significance is demonstrated through Ashurnasirpal II's making of an offering to the gods. This religious context is also highlighted in the *Annals of Ashurnasirpal II* in which Ashurnasirpal II recounts that "the gods Ninurta and Nergal, who love my priesthood, gave me wild animals of the plains, commanding me to hunt. 30 elephants I trapped and killed; 257 great wild oxen I brought down with my weapons, attacking from my chariot; 370 great lions I killed with hunting-spears" (Reade 1998:39)<sup>7</sup>.



Figure 7: Ashurnasirpal II's Bull Hunt Scene.



Figure 8: Ashurnasirpal II Pours a Libation over the Victims of his Hunt.

Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh contained a bull hunt frieze of which only a section, now housed

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<sup>7</sup>The location of Ashurnasirpal II's hunts was an area up the Euphrates River from his capital at Nimrud, an area in which Shalmaneser III also claims to have hunted bulls (Thomason 2005:189).

in the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin, survives [figure 9]. A bull, pierced by three arrows, is shown running from a chariot. Only the front part of the horses which pull the chariot remain. Another bull is visible beneath the horses' hooves. This relief is fragmentary and it is impossible to know how it would have looked when whole, but it most likely was very similar to the bull hunt relief of Ashurnasirpal II.



Figure 9: Sennacherib's Bull Hunt Scene.

Some relief figures from Ashurnasirpal II's palace wear garments which are decorated with incised designs which represent embroidery. There are more varied hunt scenes in these decorations than in the monumental sculpture. A scene of a bull hunt from a chariot is found along the edge of a shawl below the arm of a winged protective figure now in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore [figure 10]. The king draws his bow at two bulls while the driver holds the reins. One bull runs alongside the chariot while the other plunges towards it. Another scene along the bottom of a garment worn by a figure on a relief now in the British Museum shows the king in a chariot shooting his bow and arrow at two bulls [figure 11]. Soldiers on foot carrying bows and spears follow him. Two hunters on horseback chase a bull towards the king. According to Canby (1971:38), these smaller hunt scenes do "not correspond in point of view with monumental sculpture" and reveal an "actual, narrative quality" which the palace reliefs lack. This difference originates in the purpose of the depictions. The palace reliefs reflect a statement of the king's superior nature and were meant to be viewed by foreign emissaries in the palace. The sculptures representing embroidery in contrast were of a more decorative nature, and as such did not need to reflect the symbolic and propagandistic nature of the larger reliefs.



Figure 10: The Bull Hunt Scene on the Edge of a Shawl.



Figure 11: The Bull Hunt Scene on the Bottom of a Garment.

### 3.4 The Balawat Gates

Ashurnasirpal II's lion and bull hunts are also depicted on the bronze reliefs which decorated the huge doors of his palace at Balawat, near Nimrud. The bronze bands were embossed and show the king's achievements. There are scenes of warfare, and of prisoners and tribute. As with the White Obelisk, a hunt scene is found amongst these important events in the king's reign, demonstrating its importance to the Assyrian kings. The lowest two registers of the bronze bands depict the king and his companions hunting lions and wild bulls. A bull, a cow and a calf flee from hunters in a chariot. An archer on foot also shoots at a charging bull and calf.

### 3.5 Minor Arts

Scenes depicted on the palace reliefs were copied in minor arts in both Assyria and lands under Assyrian rule. A conventional bull hunt is depicted on an ivory plaque from the head of a bed which was found in room SW7 of Fort Shalmaneser at Nimrud. Four men are shown in a chariot which is chasing two bulls. One of the men leans over a shield at the back of the chariot and sinks a spear into the neck of an attacking bull (Aiken Littauer & Crouwer 1973:27). The top register of a silver beaker from Hasanlu, a site in present day northwest Iran, has a battle scene with a charioteer who leans hard on his reins and tilts his head back for balance. The lower register of the beaker shows an archer hunching over as he sneaks up behind a bull (Canby 1971:43). This recalls the depiction on the Balawat Gates. These two are unusual for Assyrian

depictions of the bull hunt because the hunter is on foot and uses a bow and arrow. The figures on the Hasanlu beaker and the Balawat Gates do not appear to be royal. The king is shown attacking a bull on an ivory panel from northwestern Iran, and now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art [figure 12]. It has been dated to the eighth or seventh century. The king thrusts a spear into a bull which is being chased by a chariot (Metropolitan Museum of Art 1984:31). While the non-royal hunters are shown with bows and arrows, the king is shown combatting the bull with a spear. With archery, the enemy can be dispatched from a distance. Only the king is shown in the close combat necessary for spear and sword use, which emphasises his strength, bravery and prowess.



Figure 12: Ivory Panel from Northwest Iran.

### 3.6 Tell Halaf

During the Iron Age the archaeological site of Tell Halaf, located in Northern Mesopotamia in present day northern Syria near the Turkish border, was known as Guzana and was the capital of the Aramaean kingdom of Bit Bahiani. During the ninth century the city flourished under Assyrian control. Its sculpture was strongly influenced by the arts of Mesopotamia and its repertoire reflects that of Assyria (Charles-Picard 1972:170). A limestone relief from the *bît hilani*<sup>8</sup> at Tell Halaf, now in the Pergamon Museum, shows a bull being hunted from a chariot [figure 13] (Jakob-Ros, Klengel-Brandt, Marzahn & Wartke 1992). One man holds the reins and steers the chariot, while another, thought to be the king (Charles-Picard 1972:170), shoots a bow and arrow at the bull, which is placed above the chariot.

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<sup>8</sup>A *bît hilani* is a type of palace from the ninth to seventh centuries in North Syria, the portico of which had one to three columns (Frankfort 1952:120).

The bull hunt was depicted in relief at Halaf more than a millennium earlier. A basalt relief depicting an archer hunting a wild bull belongs to the old objects of the temple, dated to before 2000BC [figure 14] (Bodenheimer 1960b:6). This piece therefore reveals a continuation, at least in northern Mesopotamia, of the tradition of depictions of the bull hunt between the early seals and the Assyrian works.



Figure 13: The Bull Hunt Relief from the *Bît Hilani* at Tell Halaf.

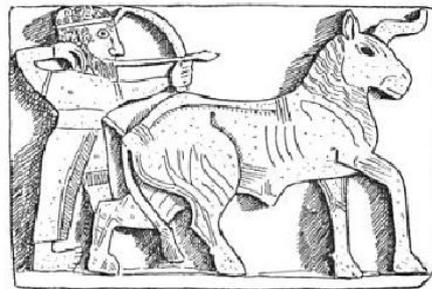


Figure 14: The Bull Hunt Relief from Tell Halaf from the Third Millennium.

The earliest Mesopotamian work depicting a bull hunt comes from the Uruk Period and has a clear ritual context. This context is also visible in Ashurnasirpal II's palace relief in which he pours a libation over the bulls which he has killed in his hunt. The positioning of depictions of the bull hunt between those of military campaigns and religious rituals reveals that it was regarded amongst the most important events in a king's reign. The king is predominantly shown killing bulls with a dagger or a spear from a chariot, but rare examples are known where he does so on foot. Although accompanied by attendants, the king is always the centre of the action, being the one who kills the bulls and who has control of the situation. The bull hunt was therefore a metaphor of his superior power and ability to rule the empire.

#### 4. EGYPT

Hunting was a highly symbolic activity with a prominent role in Egyptian kingship and religion. Symbolically, the wild animals which were hunted were seen as the unruly forces of nature, and

by hunting them, the king showed his power and ability to uphold the order and stability (*maat*) of Egyptian civilization. Hunting therefore became a metaphor for royal authority and the universal aspiration to defeat the ultimate chaos of death (Wilkinson 2005:109). Big game hunting was the prerogative of the pharaohs, and lion and bull hunting was reserved for the king into the New Kingdom (Kyle 2007:33).

Hunting would have involved a combination of chase, ambush, and traps. Animals were hunted in the wild, and wild animals were also gathered for hunts, or trapped by fences and ditches. An Eighteenth Dynasty royal hunting park from the time of Amenhotep III was found at Soleb in Nubia, and Tutankhamun built a hunting lodge near the Sphinx at Giza (Wilkinson 2005:110).

#### 4.1 The Label of Aha

In Egypt from the Predynastic Period onwards, rulers depicted themselves in the act of hunting. The first bull-hunting scene dates to the First Dynasty reign of Aha [figure 15]. Small ivory plaques, commonly called labels, recorded outstanding events in the reigns of the early rulers. One such label, which contains Aha's name in a *serekh*, records the foundation of a temple to the goddess Neith (Rice 1999:2). In the label's second register, a bull is shown running into a net<sup>9</sup>. Related to this may be a scene on the ceremonial Narmer Macehead from Hierakonpolis, on which an enclosure of wild cattle is depicted near the pharaoh [figure 16].

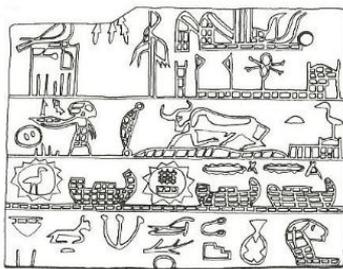


Figure 15: Label of Aha.

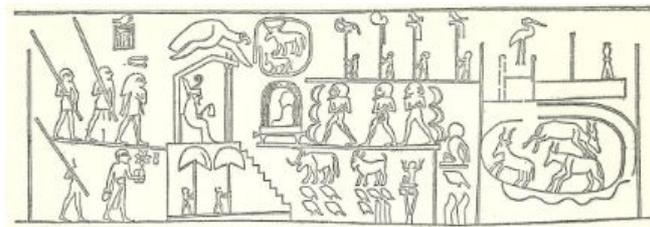


Figure 16: The Narmer Macehead.

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<sup>9</sup>See *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods* for a different interpretation of the iconography of this label.

## 4.2 The Corridor of the Bull

Bull hunts were practised from the earliest periods of Egyptian history until the extinction of the wild bull in the New Kingdom but the best evidence for the practice comes from the New Kingdom. A scene in the so-called Corridor of the Bull in the cenotaph of Seti I at Abydos in Upper Egypt shows Ramses II and prince Amenhirkhopshef, Ramses II's eldest son<sup>10</sup>, lassoing a bull [figure 17]. The bull is trying to escape from Ramses II and Amenhirkhopshef, but the lasso has caught it around the base of its horns. Ramses and Amenhirkhopshef run behind the bull, Ramses holds the rope in his hands, while Amenhirkhopshef holds the bull by its tail. According to Baqué (2002:43-4), scenes such as this represent a ritual activity in which the king assimilated the strength of the bull. They also demonstrate the king's capability to rule and to bring order to the forces of chaos.

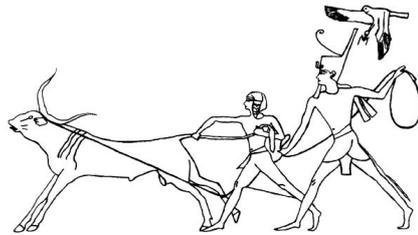


Figure 17: The scene from the Corridor of the Bull.

## 4.3 The Bull Hunt Relief at Medinet Habu

The introduction of the chariot into Egypt during the New Kingdom led to its use in hunting animals in the wild (Kyle 2007:34). This can be seen on the bull hunt relief at Ramses III's mortuary temple at Medinet Habu<sup>11</sup> [figure 18]. This relief is located on the back of the first pylon on the south side of the temple (Stevenson Smith 1998:217). It is the last illustration of the traditional chariot-riding huntsman-king (Tyldesley 2007:40). Ramses III balances himself in his chariot and wields a long spear while three bulls try to escape amongst reeds. Below this scene is a register which contains a depiction of Ramses III's escorts, some of which shoot

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<sup>10</sup>Rice (1999:165) identifies these figures rather as Seti I and Ramses II respectively.

<sup>11</sup>Ramses III's mortuary temple at Medinet Habu is most famous for the depiction of his battle with the Sea Peoples.

arrows at the bulls. The three bulls are generally thought to be three separate victims of the hunt, but Fassone and Ferraris (2007:81) believe that the three bulls represent three different stages in the narrative. In this interpretation, the bull in the reeds depicts the bull trying to escape from the pharaoh, the second bull, which lies beneath the chariot depicts the same bull which has not managed to escape, and the third bull shows this bull in the throes of death after having been killed by the pharaoh. Because the wild bull is believed to already have been extinct in Egypt before the reign of Ramses III, Ikram (1995:13) posits that scenes such as this are “probably archaisms rather than events that actually occurred, unless they took place somewhere other than Egypt<sup>12</sup>.” In either case it is significant that they were included in the artistic repertoire, but if they represented events which no longer occurred, depictions of the practice must exist because this practice was particularly meaningful.



Figure 18: Ramses III's Wild Bull Hunt Relief.

#### 4.4 Amenhotep III's Wild Bull Hunt Scarabs

The iconographic sources are complemented by textual sources. Tuthmosis III claims to have killed a herd of twelve wild bulls in just one hour (Tyldesley 2007:40). The most important written document is the series of Amenhotep III's Wild Bull Hunt Scarabs<sup>13</sup>. According to the

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<sup>12</sup>Gordon and Schwabe (2004:139), for example, suggest the hunt took place in southwestern Asia.

<sup>13</sup>In the first eleven years of his reign, Amenhotep III issued five groups of large commemorative scarabs which detailed important events during his rule. These included his marriage to Tiye, his irrigation project in Upper Egypt, and his sporting achievements, and were circulated throughout his realm. Over 120 of

inscription on the scarab, word reached Amenhotep III that a herd of wild cattle had been spotted in the district of Shetep in Wadi Natrun, a valley in northern Egypt. He travelled there and ordered the cattle to be herded into an enclosure with a ditch where 170 heads were counted. “The number his majesty took in hunting on this day: 56 wild bulls. His majesty waited four days on account of the need to give rest to his horses. His majesty appeared in the chariot. The number of bulls he took in hunting: 40 wild bulls. Total of wild bulls: 96 ” (Kyle 2007:34). The animals were driven into an enclosure before Amenhotep III shot them with arrows and javelins from his chariot (O’Connor & Cline 2001:13). Although it is implied that the pharaoh hunted alone, the reality is that he would have had numerous attendants to help him. This hunt occurred in the second year of Amenhotep III’s reign, and it is likely that the series was commissioned to demonstrate his ability as a new ruler. The pharaoh’s success as a hunter symbolised his victory on the battle field, and for the triumph of order over chaos (O’Connor & Cline 2001:13).

Bull hunts were practised throughout Egyptian history, but they were portrayed primarily in New Kingdom art. The earliest example comes from the reign of Aha during the First Dynasty and provides evidence that traps and nets were used in hunting. By the New Kingdom, while these devices must still have been in use, the king was shown hunting alone, emphasising his prowess. Although the hunt had a religious function, this wasn’t explicitly shown, as it was in Assyrian art. Amenhotep III’s series of Wild Bull Hunt Scarabs reveals that portrayals of the bull hunt could act as propaganda, demonstrating the pharaoh’s extraordinary ability to rule. This accounts for the presence of monumental artistic depictions such as the Corridor of the Bull in Set I’s cenotaph and the bull hunt relief at Medinet Habu.

## 5. THE LEVANT

A gold dish dating from the fourteenth century was found near the Temple of Baal on the acropolis of Ugarit (Aruz *et al* 2008:243). The decoration of the dish depicts a hunter in a

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one series survive which recount the number of lions he killed during his first ten years of rule (Tyldesley 2007:40). Only five examples survive of his wild bull hunt series (O’Connor & Cline 2001:12). For a full description of and discussion on Amenhotep III’s large commemorative scarabs see Blankenberg-van Delden, 1969.

chariot, accompanied by a dog, chasing a goat and a herd of wild cattle [figure 19]. The hunter uses a bow to shoot at the cattle, while the reins of his horses are tied around his waist. The implication of this is that the hunter conducts the hunt alone, emphasising his prowess. In reality this pose would have been impossible, and the hunter would have been accompanied at least by one other person who held the reins. The herd of cattle are shown as a young bull, a cow and her calf, and an older bull, which is heavier and more imposing. The last of these lowers its horns and charges the chariot. The whole forms a dynamic, endless composition. The hunter most likely represents the king, and, because this dish was found close to the Temple of Baal, it is believed that the dish was presented to the sanctuary by the king (Demange *et al* 1995:185).



Figure 19: Gold Dish from Ugarit.

Mythological texts from Ugarit often describe the main gods of their pantheon as taking bovine forms: El as an adult bull, Baal as a young bull, and Anat as a cow<sup>14</sup>. Aruz *et al* (2008:243) believe the depiction in the dish to represent a traditional representation of power, set specifically in relation to the local deities. The hunter, representing the king, and the herd of wild cattle, representing the gods, depict a “confrontation between royal and divine power” (Aruz *et al* 2008:243). Demange *et al* (1995:185), in contrast, believe the depiction to represent a cosmic hunting scene. While the bulls can be explained to represent El and Baal, and the cow to

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<sup>14</sup>The association with El and Baal with the bull and Anat with the cow are discussed in *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*, and *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses* respectively.

represent Anat, it is uncertain, according to this hypothesis, which god is represented by the calf. If the calf does not represent a god, then it is unlikely that the rest of the herd does. Because depictions of bull hunts were such an important expression of kingship across the ancient Near East, there is no reason to imagine that the cattle on this dish represent divinities. The dish more likely displays a conventional representation of kingly power.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Hunting originally began as a means of providing food for the community. A wild bull provided more meat than a gazelle did, so the killing of a bull would have been more impressive and more important to the early inhabitants of the ancient Near East. As a stratified society developed, the hunt of certain animals, such as bulls and lions, became a privilege of the upper classes. The royal hunts symbolised this position to the peoples over which the kings ruled. This development is reflected in the portrayals of the bull hunt in ancient Near Eastern art and iconography. The bull hunt was depicted on a fresco in Anatolia at Çatalhöyük during the Neolithic Period, on cylinder seals during the Uruk Period in Mesopotamia, and on an ivory label from the reign of Aha in the First Dynasty in Egypt. During the Assyrian Period depictions of bull hunts decorated palace reliefs and monumental obelisks, while in Egypt they decorated the funerary monuments of pharaohs. This reflects a development to depictions of the bull hunt which were of a more public nature, which in turn reflects a change in the motivation to depict bull hunts. The older relief from Alaçahöyük and the inscription from Naram-Sin's provide a link between the earlier examples from Çatalhöyük, the Uruk Period and First Dynasty Egypt, and the later examples from the first and late second millennia. They prove that, although depictions from the third millennium are rare, royal bull hunts were practised during all periods.

On the seal from the Uruk Period, the bull hunt is placed within a religious context by the inclusion of the ring-post, sacred to Inanna, while on the Aha label the bull hunt is associated with the founding of the Temple of Neith. This obvious religious aspect is still present in some Assyrian works, such as the relief from Ashurnasirpal II's palace in which the king pours a libation over the dead animals, but is missing in the Egyptian examples. Although not explicit, the bull hunt in the Corridor of the Bull may reflect a ritual activity in which the king assimilated

the strength of the bull. The bull was a symbols of strength across the ancient Near East, and by defeating the bull, the king could claim to have even greater power. The focus then shifts from the ritual or religious aspect of the hunt to the king's role in the hunt, and the bull hunt becomes an expression of royal power.

The bull hunt depicted on the gold dish from Ugarit and that depicted on Ramses III's Bull Hunt Relief at Medinet Habu further demonstrate the king's prowess by depicting him as hunting the bulls alone from a chariot. In Urartian and Assyrian chariot scenes the king is accompanied by an attendant who drives the chariot, which reveals a more realistic depiction of the hunt. In all areas the king was portrayed as the primary hunter and the one who deals the animal the deathblow. If attendants are depicted, they are shown carrying the king's equipment. In reality he would have had a retinue of assistants to tilt the odds in his favour. The depictions in which the king uses weapons for close combat, such as the spear and dagger, as opposed to those in which a bow and arrow are used, emphasise the king's bravery.

The fact that there are no known depictions of the bull hunt in Hittite Anatolia may be due to the bull representing the god Teshub at the time. If the hunt was an expression of royal power and the bull a representation of the god, bull hunts would present a triumph of Man over God, a notion which was hubristic and blasphemous

The bull hunt expressed certain functions of royalty, such as the function of the king as a protector of his realm, for if he could win in combat against these aggressive beasts, he would be able to defend his empire. If the ruler was unable to kill the beasts, it would suggest personal weakness or the inability to control nature and their realm. Precautions were therefore taken to ensure a successful hunt. The hunt therefore became not a necessity for survival but a symbolic affirmation of the ruler's status.

## SECTION C: THE BULL AND DIVINITES

### CHAPTER 6: HORNED HEADDRESS OF DIVINITY

*Horned headdresses served as a mark of divinity in the ancient Near East. These horns were associated with the bull and everything it stood for. Depictions from across the ancient Near East will be examined to illustrate developments in the depiction of the horned headdress, as well as to identify conventions for its use.*

#### 1. INTRODUCTION

Symbols were used in ancient Near Eastern art to portray, amongst other things, deities. The images were simple and their meaning quite plain. A symbol usually represented one specific deity, but it could be associated with more than one deity, or a single deity could have more than one symbol. The horned headdress was worn by gods and goddesses, marking their divinity in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant.

Farbridge (2003:191) suggests that the horns originated from the headdress of the Babylonian Moon God Sin. According to this theory, the horns did not originally represent the horns of a bull, but the crescent moon, and they first symbolised Sin's power, and later came to be associated with the power of all the gods. The major flaw in this hypothesis is that the earliest depictions of horned headdresses were not associated with the Moon God. The horns of this headdress were derived from the horns of wild cattle (Black & Green 1992:103). Many scholars, such as Frazer (2003:123) associate these horns with fertility. Curtis (1990:31) argues that "horns primarily symbolize strength and dignity, and only in special cases refer to fertility." According to Keel (1997:86) bull horns were symbols of power in the ancient Near East, and the horned headdress can therefore, by association, also symbolise power.

Horned headdresses were not a mark of divinity in Egypt, with each Egyptian deity having their own distinct headdress. Depictions of horned headdresses from Mesopotamia, the Levant and Hittite Anatolia will be studied to trace developments in its appearance in the different areas, as well as to discern its meaning.

## 2. MESOPOTAMIA

### 2.1 Horned Headdresses Denoting General Divinity

In Mesopotamia art, from at least as early as the Early Dynastic Period, a headdress decorated with bull's horns was used to signify divinity. The style of the horned headdress changed over time. These headdresses could have up to seven superimposed pairs of horns. In later periods single pairs of horns usually indicated lower ranks of divinity (Oates 2003:41).

Few definite representations of deities survive from earlier periods, so it is difficult to determine if bull's horns denoted divinity in these periods. The upper register of the Warka Vase [figure 1], found at Uruk and dating to the Uruk Period, contains a depiction of a female figure who can be identified as Inanna by the ring-posts<sup>15</sup> behind her. According to Schmandt-Besserat (2007:43-4) the figure represents not Inanna, but a priestess of this goddess. This is unlikely because, although the vase is broken<sup>16</sup> and most of the figure's headdress is obscured, a horn signifying her divinity is clearly visible just to the right of the break. The horn is quite short and thick. Because the vase is damaged, it is uncertain what kind of headdress this horn was attached to, but it may have been either a band or a low cap. The headdress would have contained a second horn. This depiction is a unique example of the horned headdress at this early period. There are representations of the priest-king, but there appear to be no other depictions of deities from this period. It is impossible to tell if the horned headdress was used as a universal mark of divinity.



Figure 1: The Warka Vase (detail)



Figure 2: Eannatum's Stele of the Vultures (detail)

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<sup>15</sup>These ring-posts are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses*.

<sup>16</sup>This break occurred in antiquity. Its subsequent repair in antiquity suggests that it was an important piece already at an early period.

In Early Dynastic Period depictions one pair of short horns projects from a rather flat cap. On Eannatum of Lagash's Stele of the Vultures, the gods are depicted wearing caps which have horns that curve gently inwards [figure 2]. In the centre of the cap, between the horns, a bull's head faces the viewer. The horns of this bull's head are the same as the horns on the cap. The horns on the cap therefore must represent bull's horns. The caps are also trimmed with what Collon (1995a:507) describes as "sprigs of vegetation" and what Van Buren (1945:105) describes as a "feather border." It is difficult to discern which of these is depicted. Vegetation would be symbolic of the role of gods in fertility, but in later headdresses, the trimming appears rather to represent feathers. A small bas-relief dating to about 2700 known as the *Figure aux plumes* [figure 3], now housed in the Louvre, depicts a priest-king wearing a headdress which contains long "plumes or palm leaves" (Demange et al 1995:21). Although this figure does not represent a god, the piece provides evidence of a long tradition of these plumes or fronds being associated with power. The same headdress as worn by the deities on the Stele of the Vultures is worn by a goddess on a fragment of a stone vase dating to circa 2430 [figure 4], now housed in the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin, and a seated god incised on a limestone votive plaque from Nippur which dates to circa 2400 [figure 5].



Figure 3: *Figure aux plumes* (detail).



Figure 4: Stone Vase (detail).

Few representations of the horned headdress occur in sculpture in the round. The best examples from the Early Dynastic Period are found on foundation pegs. During the Early Dynastic Period foundation pegs were often moulded in the form of the ruler or his personal god, or in the form

of a genie (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:31). The copper alloy foundation pegs of Enmetena<sup>17</sup> of Lagash [figure 6] represent a long-haired, clean-shaven man with a bare chest. The two small horns on his head show that the figure depicts a god, and not the ruler himself (Jakob-Rost *et al* 1992:82). These horns appear to be attached to the head of the figure, rather than to a headdress. This suggests that, at least during this period, the most important aspect of the divine headdress was the horns.



Figure 5: Limestone Plaque.  
from Nippur (detail)



Figure 6: Foundation Peg of  
Enmetena of Lagash (detail).

The foundation peg and the vase fragment are contemporary, but the two headdresses are notably different. The provenance of both pieces is unknown, so it is uncertain whether the differences are due to the different media and manufacturing methods, due to different artistic conventions in different areas of manufacture, or merely due to the taste and interpretation of the artist.



Figure 7: Cylinder Seal of Adda.

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<sup>17</sup>Previously read as Entemena.

During the Akkadian and Ur III periods the headdress was sometimes depicted as quite flat with two horns curling from each side up and around to meet at the top of the head. This headdress is similar in appearance to the Early Dynastic horned caps, except that it does not contain the trimming or the bull's head. Other horned headdresses, such as those worn by the gods on the Akkadian greenstone cylinder seal of Adda [figure 7] in the British Museum, are conical and have tiers of up to five pairs of horns protruding outwards. These two headdresses were used simultaneously, and sometimes occur together on the same artefact. A dark green serpentine cylinder seal now housed in the British Museum depicts a worshipper and three gods approaching a seated goddess [figure 8]. The three gods wear the second, more elaborate tiered horned headdress, while the seated goddess wears the more simple horned cap. The gods are carrying objects to present to the goddess, and therefore appear to be subordinate to her. Oates' assertion that "single pairs of horns usually identify lower ranks of divinity" (2003:41) can not apply to this and similar cylinder seals. Then, at least during the Akkadian Period, there was no discrimination in the use of horned headdress, and one type of headdress was not used to the exclusion of the other.



Figure 8: Akkadian cylinder seal.

Naram-Sin, the fourth ruler of the Akkadian dynasty, was deified in his own lifetime<sup>18</sup>. In his

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<sup>18</sup>In inscriptions his name is preceded by the cuneiform sign for 'god', usually written before the name of a god, and he is referred to not merely as divine, but literally as 'god of Agade' (Oates 2003:41). Naram-Sin's deification is usually interpreted as a deliberate attempt to create a rallying point for the empire's widely diverse and potentially divisive elements. Posing as a god was the most effective way in which he could secure absolute obedience from the various *ensis*, or governors, of his empire (Roux 1992:156). His deification also played on the ancient traditions of city-allegiance (Oates 2003:41). Where before each city-state had had its own patron deity, the Akkadian Empire did not have its own special deity. Naram-Sin became that god (Franke 1995:834). Inscriptions from Naram-Sin's reign show that the ruler and his city became the focus of the kingdom, and Naram-Sin therefore became the god of his realm (Postgate 1995:401).

famous victory stele, now housed in the Louvre, Naram-Sin is depicted twice the size of his troops and he wears the horned headdress usually reserved for deities [figure 9]. The horned headdress appears as a helmet with two encircling horns. On the stele Naram-Sin is shown significantly below and subordinate to the rayed discs which symbolise the gods. Naram-Sin portrayed himself as a god, but he was not the equal of the gods of the national pantheon.



Figure 9: Victory Stele of Naram-Sin (detail)



Figure 10: Plaque from Mari (detail).

By the Isin-Larsa Period the caps were domed with up to seven superimposed pairs of horns which curved inwards on the headdress rather than protruding out from it. The headdresses are often shown frontally, even when the figure is in profile, like on a plaque of a goddess from early second millennium Mari [figure 10]. The horned headdress was portrayed in this manner until the Neo-Assyrian Period with few exceptions. An example of such an exception is the diorite statue of Puzur-Ishtar [figure 11], deified ruler of Mari, which was discovered at Babylon, where it would have been taken as booty when Hammurabi captured the city in about 1760 (Amiet 1980:449). The ruler wears a close-fitting headdress with one pair of horns that curls around the entire headdress and curves up above Puzur-Ishtar's face. The horns are small and stylised, almost losing the appearance of horns entirely. The appearance of this headdress may have been the convention for depicting horned headdresses at Mari, because the statue of the goddess with the flowing vase from the site wears a similar headdress [figure 12].

During the Neo-Assyrian Period horned headdresses were also depicted as square hats with flat

tops and horns protruding forward out of the base. This style was used into the Persian Period, when Ahura Mazda wore a square headdress. While the horned headdress was ubiquitous during the early periods, by these later periods the gods could wear headdresses with or without horns. Where the horn had been the most important part of the headdress in earlier periods, as demonstrated by the foundation pegs of Enmetena, during the later periods the headdress itself had become more important.



Figure 11: Puzur-Ishtar (detail).



Figure 12: Goddess with the flowing vase (detail)

## 2.2 Horned Headdresses Denoting Specific Gods

Although originally used to denote general divinity, the horned cap was at times used to symbolise a particular major deity, though this use was never consistent. On Kassite *kudurrus*<sup>19</sup> a horned headdress on a podium symbolised Anu, the supreme god. Three horned headdress on podium represented the great triad of Anu, Enlil and Ea. More commonly Ea was represented by his ram-headed crook or a tortoise, and only two horned headdresses, representing Anu and Enlil, were depicted (van Buren 1945:104).

The *Kudurru* for Ritti-Marduk [figure 13], a military leader from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar I, contains an inscription on one side and symbols of the gods carved into registers on the other. The upper register contains astral symbols, while the second contains three horned headdresses on pedestals. These three horned headdress would represent Anu, Enlil and Ea.

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<sup>19</sup>A *kudurru* is a type of stone document used as boundary stone which records land grants.

The black limestone *Kudurru* of Meli-Shipak II<sup>20</sup>, the third ruler of the Kassite Dynasty of Babylon, records the lands given by the king to his son and crown-prince, Marduk-Apla-Iddina I (Leick 2002:104). Symbols of the gods appear in registers on one side of the *kudurru*. In the uppermost register Anu and Enlil are both portrayed by a horned headdress on a pedestal [figure 14] (Demange *et al* 1995:67).



Figure 13: Upper register of the Kudurru for Ritti-Markdu (detail).



Figure 14: Upper register of the Kudurru of Meli-Shipak (detail).

During the Neo-Assyrian Period usually only one horned headdress, representing Ashur, was depicted in royal stela. When three horned headdresses were depicted together, these represented Ashur, Anu and Enlil (Black & Green 1992:102). A black basalt stele of Esarhaddon [figure 15], found in Babylon and now in the British Museum, contains a text concerning the reconstruction of Babylon on the part of Esarhaddon. The king is praying while facing an altar on which a horned headdress rests. This headdress symbolises Ashur. It is square and is trimmed with a “feather border on top” (Van Buren 1945:105).



Figure 15: Esarhaddon Stele (detail)

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<sup>20</sup>This piece is also sometimes known as the Kudurru of Melishishu, eg. Demange *et al* (1995:66).

Horned headdresses were used throughout Mesopotamian history to denote divinity. The headdresses from the Early Dynastic Period depictions had a bull's head in the centre, pointing to the origin of the horned headdress as being associated with the bull. These headdresses were also trimmed with feathers or vegetation, which due to other depictions, can be associated with a display of power. If this trimming represents vegetation, an aspect of fertility is also represented.

The Early Dynastic foundation pegs of Enmetena show that during the early periods the horns were the most important aspect of the headdress as a mark of divinity. This pre-eminence was lost by the Neo-Assyrian Period, when the headdress of divinity could appear with or without horns.

It is clear that more than one type of horned headdress could be in use at the same time. While during later periods this may have reflected different positions in the hierarchy of the pantheon, during early periods there seems to have been no discrimination in its use. However, there may have been some regional differences, such as the headdresses shown to be worn by divine beings at Mari.

From the Kassite Period on the horned headdress was used not only to denote divinity, but also to denote specific gods. These gods were the highest gods of the pantheon. The horned headdress, as a symbol of godly power, was therefore associated with the most powerful gods.

### 3. THE LEVANT

#### 3.1 The Horned Headdresses of the Gods

Horned caps were used to denote divinity not only in Mesopotamia, but also in other areas of the ancient Near East. In the Levant, as in Mesopotamia, the style of the horned headdress did not remain consistent. A bronze statuette of a seated deity from the seventeenth century, from Qatna in central Syria and now in the Louvre [figure 16], wears an ovoid headdress with four pairs of horns. This headdress is also found on a basalt head of a god, found at Jabbul near Aleppo and dating to the sixteenth century, also now housed in the Louvre [figure 17]. This appears to be

a three-dimensional representation of the contemporary two-dimensional Mesopotamian horned headdress, and the horns are rendered in a rather stylised fashion. In a similar manner, the horned headdress of a basalt statue of a god from the seventeenth to sixteenth century, now in the Cleveland Museum of Art [figure 18], is similar as that found on the statue of Puzur-Ishtar of Mari. The headdress is conical with one pair horns which curl around the headdress and curve upwards above the figure's face. The tradition of horned headdresses of divinity is much older in Mesopotamia, and the early Levantine horned headdresses probably find their origin in their Mesopotamian predecessors.



Figure 16: Seated deity from Qatna (detail)



Figure 17: Basalt head from Jabbul

Levantine horned headdresses soon exhibit their own style and conventions. The Great Stele of Baal, excavated by Claude Schaeffer at Ugarit on the north coast of Syria and now housed in the Louvre [figure 19], dates from the sixteenth or fifteenth century (Green 2003:165). Here Baal wears a pointed helmet with a pair of horns which both project forward out of the helmet. Horns were seldom depicted as a part of the helmet after this period; they all project out of it.



Figure 18: Basalt statue of a god (detail).



Figure 19: Great Stele of Baal (detail).

A stele dating from the sixteenth to fourteenth century found on the acropolis of Ugarit bears a depiction of a god with a high headdress [figure 19]. The headdress appears to be composed of a long plume and has a horn protruding forwards. The plume is similar to those on the *Figure aux plumes*, and, although dating a millennium after Eannatum's Stele of the Vultures, this piece may depict an adaption and continuation of the ideology represented by these Early Dynastic Mesopotamian headdresses, and associate this god with power and, possibly, fertility.



Figure 20: Stele with god with plumed headdress (detail).



Figure 21: Bronze and electrum statuette of a smiting god (detail)

Bronze statuettes of gods from the fourteenth to twelfth centuries wear a number of different headdresses, including a high Egyptian-style crown and crown with projecting horns. Many of these statuettes come from Ugarit and are thought to depict Baal. These statues raise their right arms in the smiting position<sup>21</sup>. One example, now in the Louvre [figure 21], wears a conical helmet with a knob at the top made of stone with thin protruding horns of electrum. Another statuette wears a similarly shaped headdress. This headdress has two holes at the side in which two horns would have been secured. A third statuette wears a conical headdress with two sets of horns protruding outwards.

Baal and Resheph were both depicted wearing horned headdresses (Gray 1952:217), which means that the horned headdress cannot denote one single deity. There are many statuettes of

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<sup>21</sup>In the smiting posture, the god's feet are separated as in a stride, and one arm is raised. It is the natural posture for wielding certain weapons such as the mace and spear. These weapons seldom survive. Depictions of deities in relief and in sculpture in the round in this posture are found across the ancient Near East, and survive into the Classical Period in depictions of Zeus or Jupiter wielding a thunderbolt.

Baal found at Ugarit with different horned headdresses, so the different headdresses cannot denote different divinities. Additionally, the statuettes of Baal from Ugarit reveal that the differences cannot be due to geographic considerations. The depictions of different types of headdress were produced at roughly the same time, meaning that the difference can also not be a chronological development of its iconography. It appears then that, like in Mesopotamia, different horned headdresses were used indiscriminately to denote divinity.

Frazer (2003:123) believes that the horned headdress symbolised the fertility of the deity who wore the headdress. A problem with this theory is that Resheph, who was depicted wearing the horned headdress, was a god of plague and pestilence, and his association with the horned headdress makes it difficult to reconcile the horned headdress with fertility. But, Baal, as a Storm God, was particularly associated with fertility, and because the bull was also a symbol of fertility, it is hard to believe that the horned headdresses of divinity did not have at least some aspect of fertility. A Biblical text may be able to explain this apparent contradiction. According to Balaam in Numbers 23:22, Yahweh protects the Israelites, and “what its curving horns are to the wild ox, God is to them”. Farbridge (2003:191) understands this passage to describe Yahweh as having horns like a wild ox. Because of the Biblical ban on images, this passage may provide a textual equivalent of the visual iconography of the horned headdress. This passage then demonstrates that the horns of divinity were those of an ox or bull, and that they were associated with power. As a Storm God, part of Baal’s power was his fertility, but it was not part of Resheph’s power. The horned headdress was therefore a symbol of godly power, and whichever characteristics the god embodied would have been symbolised.

### **3.2 The Goddess’ Triple-horned Headdress**

The horned headdress was not reserved for gods. A Late Bronze Age mould of a goddess from the High Place in Nahariyah in northern Israel, dating to the seventeenth century [figure 22], also produced a cast of a goddess with a high headdress with two horns (Golden 2004:181). Patai (1990:65) identifies this goddess as “Astarte of the Horns”. This refers to Ashteroth-karnaim<sup>22</sup>, a town whose name Osborn (1859:47) translates to “Ashteroth with horns” and Hastings, Hastings and Hastings (1905:132) translate as “Ashtaroth of the two horns”.

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<sup>22</sup>Ashteroth-karnaim is discussed in further detail in *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses*.

A bronze statuette of a goddess from the middle of the second millennium, and now housed in the Louvre [figure 23], wears a headdress from which three horns project, one at each side, and the third at the front. This goddess brandishes a mace in her right hand in the smiting position, and holds an unidentified object in her left. A blade is secured at her waist.



Figure 22: Mould of a goddess from Nahariyah.

A clay head of an Edomite goddess painted red with black features from the holy precinct of Horvat Qitmit, an open-air site a few kilometres west of the Dead Sea, also wears the triple-horned headdress [figure 24] (Lewis 2005:87). This triple-horned headdress is restricted to goddesses. The function or meaning of the third horn on the headdress is uncertain (King 1993:60), although it may denote a particular goddess. The fact that she was the only deity represented in an assemblage of about five hundred complete or fragmentary figurines at Horvat Qitmit (Cohen & Yisrael 1995:225) suggests that she was a deity of considerable importance.



Figure 23: Warrior goddess.



Figure 24: Head of an Edomite goddess from Horvat Qitmit.

According to Cornelius (2004:26), the bronze statuette housed in the Louvre probably represents Astarte or Anat. It is clearly a warrior goddess which is represented, and can therefore more likely be identified as Anat<sup>23</sup>, the goddess of war as well as love, and one of the principle deities of the Canaanite pantheon. Anat was particularly associated with warfare, and “no ancient Near Eastern goddess was more bloodthirsty” (Patai 1990:61). Papyrus Chester Beatty VII, donated by Alfred Chester Beatty to the British Museum in 1930, describes Anat as a “woman acting as a warrior, clad as men and girt as women” (Manniche 1987:54). While goddesses were usually portrayed naked in Canaanite iconography, the bronze statuette is “clad as men” in a garment which ends just above her knees<sup>24</sup>. Further supporting evidence comes from the *Loves of Baal and Anat*<sup>25</sup> which contains a graphic account of sexual encounters between the two deities in which, “At her feet he [Baal] kneels and falls down. And he lifts up his voice and cries: “Hail, sister and ... ! The horns of thy ..., O Maiden Anath, The horns of thy ... Baal will anoint, Baal will anoint them in flight” (Pritchard Volume I 1973:117). Horns then appear to be particularly associated with Anat, and in addition to their martial symbolism, the reference in the *Loves of Baal and Anat* suggests that her horns had a certain sexual aspect which can be related to fertility. The statuette’s iconography could therefore plausibly identify her as Anat. Unfortunately only the head of the goddess remains from Horvat Qitmit, making identification difficult, but the fact that both goddesses wear a triple-horned headdress suggests that they represent the same goddess.

The earliest examples of the Levantine horned headdress are similar to contemporary Mesopotamian examples, which suggests that the Levantine headdresses were first borrowed from the Mesopotamian iconography. The horned headdresses underwent changes in their representation and developed a different appearance to their Mesopotamian relatives. The horns tend to project out from the headdress in both relief sculpture and in sculpture in the round.

Both gods and goddesses were depicted wearing horned headdresses. Baal and Reshef appear to have been particularly associated with the horned headdress. A unique type of horned

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<sup>23</sup>Anat is discussed in more detail in *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses*.

<sup>24</sup>The Levantine smiting gods wear skirts which are usually knee-length, but are sometimes shorter.

<sup>25</sup>Discussed in more detail in *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses*.

headdress native to the Levant is the triple-horned headdress, which is shown exclusively on statuettes of goddesses. These statuettes may represent a single goddess, perhaps Anat. The horned headdress was a symbol of power in the Levant. At times this power included an aspect of fertility.

#### 4. ANATOLIA

According to McMahon (1995:1990), Hittite deities wore a peaked cap with horns and typical Hittite dress with turned up shoes, a kilt and often a sword in the belt. While generally the case, the headdress did not always appear as a peaked or conical cap, and it sometimes didn't have horns.

A bronze statuette of a smiting god, dating to the seventeenth or sixteenth century and now housed in the Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations, wears a high conical headdress [figure 25]. This god's right arm is raised in a smiting position, and he is thus associated with the smiting gods from the Levant<sup>26</sup>. Horns are attached not to the god's headdress, but to his head. This is unusual for any area of the ancient Near East, but recalls the horns of the god's head on the Early Dynastic foundation pegs of Enmetena from Mesopotamia. The bronze statuette is far removed from these foundations pegs in both time and place, being produced at least 700 years after the foundation pegs, and a continued tradition is not suggested between the two. Rather, both pieces reveal that the horns were the mark of divinity, and that those who produced the works were aware of this association.



Figure 25: Bronze statuette of a smiting god.



Figure 26: The King's Gate from Hattusha (detail).

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<sup>26</sup>The Levantine smiting gods are discussed above.

The figure of a god decorates the King's Gate [figure 26], dating to the thirteenth century, at Hattusha, the capital of the Hittite Empire located in north-central Anatolia. This god wears a helmet with a small horn. This depiction is unusual because horned headdresses from the Hittite Imperial Period, from the fourteenth to twelfth century, are usually depicted like those worn by the gods on the rock-reliefs at the sanctuary at Yazilikaya near Hattusha<sup>27</sup>. Unlike other Anatolian examples of the horned headdress, the horn is carved on the helmet, and does not project forward.

The site of Yazilikaya was in use since the fifteenth century, but the long procession of gods and goddesses was only carved in the thirteenth century. In Chamber A<sup>28</sup>, on a relief depicting a procession of the Hittite deities [figure 27], Teshub wears a high conical headdress with multiple horns protruding forwards and backwards from the headdress and outwards from the centre of the headdress. The goddess Hebat wears a square headdress which can be identified as a polos, a high cylindrical crown. Sharumma, son of Hebat and Teshub, wears a high conical headdress with a series of horns protruding forward only.



Figure 27: Teshub, Hebat and Sharumma from Chamber A at Yazilikaya.

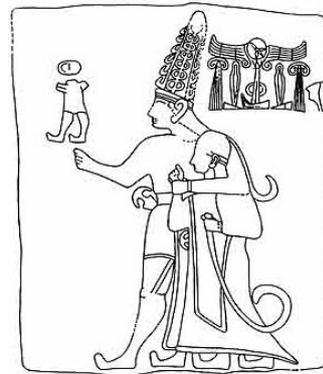


Figure 28: Sharumma and Tudhaliya IV from Chamber B at Yazilikaya.

In Chamber B Sharumma is depicted protecting the king Tudhaliya IV [figure 28]. In this

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<sup>27</sup>Discussed below.

<sup>28</sup>Both Chamber A and the gods Teshub and Sharumma are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*.

depiction Sharumma wears the more elaborate headdress worn by Teshub in Chamber A. In both Chamber A and B, the lesser gods wear high conical headdresses with one horn protruding forward from the base. During this period the more elaborate headdress was reserved for the most important gods. Gods of lesser importance were depicted with fewer horns. Sharumma was Tudhaliya's personal protective deity (Macqueen 1986:131), justifying his representation with the more elaborate headdress in Chamber B. The king would want to make Sharumma a god of utmost importance to enhance the protection which the god afforded him. However, Sharumma is the son of Teshub, the head of the Hittite pantheon, and cannot be depicted as Teshub's equal in Chamber A, and his headdress is therefore less ornate than Teshub's.

The iconographic conventions of the depiction of the horned headdress changed by the time of Neo-Hittite Period<sup>29</sup>. On the ninth century Stele of the Hittite Storm God taken to Babylon from Northern Syria as booty and now housed in the Istanbul Museum (Amiet 1980:453) the god wears a conical cap with a knob at the top and with a small horn protruding on either side [figure 29]. This headdress is also worn by the Storm God on a ninth century Stele of the Storm God from Til Barsip now housed in the Aleppo Museum [figure 30]. The shape of the headdress of the god Tarhun<sup>30</sup> on an eighth century stele from Til Barsip is the same, but there are two pairs of superimposed horns.



Figure 29: Stele of Storm God from Til Barsip (detail).



Figure 30: Stele of Tarhun<sup>30</sup> from Til Barsip (detail).

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<sup>29</sup>The Neo-Hittite Period is also known as the period of the Syro-Hittite states. This term reflects the area in south-central Anatolia in which the states arose after the collapse of the Hittite Empire in about 1180.

<sup>30</sup>Tarhun<sup>30</sup> can be identified with the Storm God Teshub, discussed in more detail in *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*. Teshub is the god's Hurrian name, while his Luwian and Hittite name is Tarhun<sup>30</sup>, or the variant forms Tarhun, Tarhunt and Tarhuwant. For convenience, the name Tarhun<sup>30</sup> will be used throughout.

Tarhunta is depicted wearing at least four different styles of horned headdress. In addition to the conical headdress with two sets of horns depicted on the stele from Til Barsip discussed above, his headdress on a stele from Arslantepe<sup>31</sup> is conical with three sets of horns. A rock-relief at Ivriz in the Taurus Mountains dating to the eighth century depicts king Warpalawas of Tuwana in prayer before Tarhunta [figure 31]. The god's headdress has two bands, one at the base and the second at roughly half the height of the headdress. Two horns project forward from the lower band, while one projects backwards and two horns are depicted facing outward from the centre on the headdress. One horn projects backwards from the second band, while two horns face outward from the centre of the band. In addition to the depictions in which the Storm God wears a horned headdress, there are depictions, like the one from Zincirli in southeastern Anatolia, where he wears a headdress with no horns. These depictions are all contemporary, and while those from Zincirli, Til Barsip and Arslantepe are similar, the headdress from the rock-relief at Ivriz differs greatly. The sites cover the expanse of the Hittite empire, and the differences in the depiction of the horned headdress may therefore be due to different artistic conventions in the different areas of the empire. It may also be that, like in Akkadian Mesopotamia and Bronze Age Canaan, the exact appearance of the horned headdress was not a set convention.

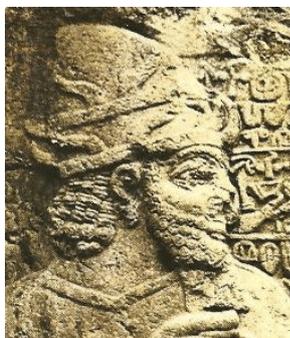


Figure 31: Rock-relief at Ivriz (detail)



Figure 32: Stele of Ishtar of Arbela (detail)

During the Hittite Imperial Period horned headdresses were the reserve of the gods, but during this Neo-Hittite Period some goddesses also wore horned headdresses. An eighth century stele from Til Barsip contains a depiction of the goddess Ishtar of Arbela with a polos surmounted by

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<sup>31</sup>Discussed in more detail below in the section on the headdress of Kubaba.

her star disc symbol [figure 32]. The polos has horns carved on the headdress at its base. The goddess holding a pomegranate carved on a relief from Carchemish, housed in the Museum of Ankara and also dating to the eighth century, also wears a polos headdress [figure 33]. A long veil covers the back of the headdress and hangs down the back of the body. The horns on this headdress project forward from the base of the headdress. A stele from Arslantepe now housed in the Museum of Ankara depicts a female figure seated on a backless chair which is mounted on the back of a bull facing a god standing on a lion [figure 34]. These figures are identified by an inscription as the goddess Kubaba and the Storm God Tarhunta (Hawkins 1981:169). Kubaba wears a polos with a veil like the one worn by the goddess holding a pomegranate from Carchemish. Although Kubaba's headdress on the stele from Arslantepe does not have horns (unlike that of the goddess holding a pomegranate) it is evident that the two depictions represent the same goddess. Because Kubaba's headdress does not contain horns in both these depictions, the horned headdress cannot have been used to consistently identify a specific deity or deities.



Figure 33: Goddess holding a pomegranate (detail).



Figure 34: Stele of Kubaba and Tarhunta.

There is a clear development in the horned headdress over time, although there are differences in its appearance even during the same period. The depictions from the Hittite Imperial Period are more elaborate than any other examples across the ancient Near East. Those of the more important gods of the pantheon are the most elaborate headdresses produced. In later periods the horned headdress did not have one consistent appearance, although the conical headdress surmounted by a knob was the most common type of depiction. This headdress could have up to three pairs of horns, and the differences in the amount of horns, unlike the examples from the Imperial Period, did not denote differences in rank amongst the gods. Indeed, Tarhunta is shown

wearing different headdresses. The difference may be due to geographic considerations.

During the Hittite Imperial Period, the horned headdress was used to denote male divinity only. Ishtar was the goddess of war as well as love, and while love was a feminine attribute, war was associated with the masculine. This may account for the horns on her headdress on the stele from Til Barsip. However, because Kubaba was also depicted wearing a horned headdress, it appears that goddesses in general wore the horned headdress in later periods, unlike their predecessors.

## 5. EGYPT

In Egypt the gods each had their own individual headdress, and horned caps were not used to denote divinity<sup>32</sup>. The gods did, however, wear a *shendyt* to which a bull's tail was attached<sup>33</sup> which fulfilled the same function.

Perhaps noteworthy is that two of Osiris's titles were "Lord of the Horns" and "Bull of the Sky" (May 1931:87). These two titles appear to provide a link between the bull and horns peculiar to a god. It is possible then that the horns of the horned headdresses were also associated with the bull.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Horned headdresses were used as a mark of divinity throughout the ancient Near East, but differences in representation and use can be discerned in the different areas. The earliest example can be traced to the Uruk Period in Mesopotamia where Inanna is shown with a horned headdress on the Warka Vase. There are many examples from Mesopotamia of the horned headdress from as early as the third millennium, while depictions from Anatolia and the Levant begin in the second millennium. The horned headdress then was a Mesopotamian innovation, the use of

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<sup>32</sup>Although some deities, such as Hathor, Satis and Sobek wore headdresses which contained horns, and the sundisc worn by the Sun God Ra was often nestled in a pair of horns, horns were not a mark of divinity in general.

<sup>33</sup>As discussed in *Chapter 4: The Bull and the King*, the bull's tail was also attached to the *shendyt* of the pharaoh, and was therefore a symbol of both kingship and divinity.

which spread to the rest of the ancient Near East, but which was not used or represented in these areas as it was in its place of origin. In Egypt, the area furthest away from Mesopotamia, the conventions for art and iconography had been set at an early period, and the use of the horned headdress was not adopted as each deity already wore a unique distinguishing headdress.

Imperial Hittite depictions of horned headdresses are unique in appearance, which suggests that, although of Mesopotamian origin, the horned headdress underwent a separate development in Anatolia. However, later Neo-Hittite examples are similar to those of the mid- to late-second millennium Levant which are depicted as conical headdresses surmounted by knobs and one or two pairs of horns. The Levantine examples are at least 300 years older, which suggests that the depictions of horned headdresses from the Neo-Hittite cities of southern Anatolia were influenced by the Levantine motif.

In Mesopotamia gods and goddesses were both depicted wearing the horned headdress. In Anatolia its use in the earlier Imperial Period was restricted to male divinities. Later, in the Neo-Hittite Period, some goddesses also wore the horned headdress, but this use was not consistent. Indeed, even gods did not consistently wear the horned headdress during this period, and, additionally, its appearance was not consistent. The Levantine horned headdresses follow a similar trend. Male deities wearing the horned headdress far outnumber female deities doing so. The notable exception is the use of the triple-horned headdress, which is worn only by goddesses. If this triple-horned headdress is associated with a one specific goddess, it would function like an Egyptian headdress rather than a horned headdress, which marks divinity in general.

It is notable that in Anatolia and the Levant it is usually goddesses who are associated with war who wear the horned headdress. Anat, who most likely represents the goddess who wears the triple-horned headdress, and Ishtar are both not only goddesses of love, but also of war. Martial qualities were associated with the masculine, as is proved by the Papyrus Chester Beatty VII which describes Anat as having both masculine and feminine qualities. It is this masculine principle which is primarily associated with the horned headdress in Anatolia and the Levant.

The horned headdress was worn by divinities in art throughout Mesopotamian history, although

its use was not consistent during the later periods. In both Anatolia and the Levant horned headdresses were not continuously or consistently worn by the deities. There are contemporary depictions of the same god wearing headdresses with or without horns, such as the stelae of Tarhunta from Til Barsip and Arslantepe, the relief depicting this god from Zincirli, and the rock-relief from Ivriz. In the Levant, while Baal and Resheph were particularly associated with the headdress, they were not consistently depicted wearing it.

The horned headdress's association with the Canaanite god of plague and pestilence, Resheph, suggests that the horned headdress could not have been consistently associated with fertility. However, if the trimming on the Early Dynastic depictions of these headdresses does represent sprigs of vegetation, then at least originally the horned headdress was associated with fertility. Baal, with whom the horned headdress was also particularly associated, was the Storm God and was thus associated with fertility. The reference in the *Loves of Baal and Anat* reveals that Anat's horns had an aspect of sexuality or fertility. In some cases then the horned headdress was related to fertility. The bull was a symbol of strength and fertility, and when the horned headdress was first used to denote divinity, these were characteristics which all gods possessed. The horned headdress therefore symbolised all the characteristics shared by the bull and the god. By the middle of the second millennium in the Levant, the horned headdress most represented divine power. When the power of a deity was connected to the deity's fertility, such as in the case of Baal, the horned headdress represented both the power of this divinity and the fertility which gave the divinity power.

The horned headdress was associated with the power and authority of the gods. In Mesopotamia during later periods single pairs of horns indicated lower ranks of divinity. On Kassite *kudurrus* Aun, Enlil and Ea, the highest gods of the Mesopotamian pantheon, are represented amongst the symbols of the gods as horned headdresses. At Yazilikaya Teshub, the head of the Hittite pantheon, is depicted wearing a more elaborate horned headdress than the other gods. The horned headdress then, as well as being associated with divinity in general, was especially associated with the highest powers, symbolising this supreme strength and authority.

## **CHAPTER 7: THE BULL AND THE GODS**

*Ancient Near Eastern gods are frequently likened to or associated with bulls in texts, but few examples of this relationship are found in iconography. Examples from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant will be studied in order to learn which gods were particularly associated with the bull, as well as to ascertain any similarities and differences in the portrayal of the relationships between these gods and the bull.*

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Bull imagery dates back to the prehistoric period. While we have no applicable mythology from prehistoric times, it is almost certain that the bull here had some religious function or significance. As discussed in Chapter 1: Bucrania, some scholars believe that the bull represented a male divinity at prehistoric sites such as Çatalhöyük. It seems more likely that, during the early periods of ancient Near Eastern history and prehistory, the bull symbolised vigour and fertility more than it did any particular deity.

The first clear evidence for a specific deity being linked to a bull comes from the end of the third millennium. More than one god was associated with the bull, which, as Ornan (2001:25) points out, “does not contradict ancient Near Eastern religious concepts, as polytheistic theology conceived the world as being simultaneously governed by several divine entities.” These entities could govern the same or similar spheres, and could be associated with the same objects and attributes. If the bull was associated with more than one god, it must be because characteristics of the bull could be compared and likened to those of the different gods. The relationship between the bull and these gods in iconographic sources will be examined to reveal which gods were particularly associated with the bull, and to track developments in the portrayal of these relationships. Examples from Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant will be studied and compared to find similarities and differences in the depictions in the different cultures of the ancient Near East.

## 2. EGYPT

Several gods had epithets which connected them with the bull. Amun was the god of creation and the wind. Min was associated with fertility, and Wainwright (1963:14) argues that he was also a Storm God. The two gods were combined in later times to form Amun-Min. The epithet *Kamutef*, meaning ‘Bull of his mother’, was applied to all three gods (Wilkinson 2005:123). Thoth, the god of wisdom, was called the ‘Bull of Truth’ (Cashford 2003:105). In the Coffin Texts the Moon God Khonsu’s waxing and waning was compared to a bull (Cashford 2003:211-2). Considerably fewer gods were associated with the bull in iconographic sources.

Apparently unique to Egypt is the worship of bulls believed to be the manifestation or divine image of a god. During the Ramesside and Late periods whole species were worshipped (Hornung 1995:1713). The sacred bulls were the Apis Bull, worshipped in Memphis as the manifestation of Ptah; the Mnevis Bull, worshipped at Heliopolis as the manifestation of Ra; and the Buchis Bull, worshipped in the area around Thebes as the manifestation of Montu.

### 2.1 The Apis Bull

The establishment of the cult of the Apis Bull is credited to the First Dynasty pharaoh Aha (Wenke 2009:242), but the cult only became popular during the New Kingdom. The Apis Bull was the most important of the sacred animals worshipped in ancient Egypt. Originally the Apis Bull was associated with fertility, and may have been a separate deity (Wilkinson 1999:281). It was later considered during its lifetime to be the physical manifestation of Ptah, the creator god of Memphis. From the New Kingdom, the Apis Bull was depicted as a bull with a sun disc between its horns<sup>1</sup> [figure 1]. He was also depicted as a man with a bull’s head [figure 2].

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<sup>1</sup>According to Wilkinson (2005:30), this had previously been the distinctive characteristic of the Mnevis Bull.



Figure 1: Statue of the Apis bull.



Figure 2: Apis with the head of a bull and the body of a man from a stele dedicated by Padiiset (detail)

After its death the Apis Bull was identified with Osiris, and was called Osiris-Apis or Osorapis. Only one sacred Apis bull lived at any time. Upon the death of that bull, a new one was identified by unique markings. These markings are recorded in Herodotus' *Histories* III:28: "the calf which is so called has the following marks: He is black, with a square spot of white upon his forehead, and on his back the figure of an eagle; the hairs in his tail are double, and there is a beetle upon his tongue" (Rawlinson 1996:236). Once chosen, the Apis Bull lived a life of luxury with a 'harem' of cows in a special enclosure south of the Temple of Ptah in Memphis (Wilkinson 2005:30). From the Eighteenth Dynasty the Apis Bull was mummified after its death in a special embalming house at Memphis. It was then buried in a huge granite sarcophagus in the catacombs of the Serapeum at Saqqara.

## 2.2 The Mnevis Bull

The sacred bull of Heliopolis was the Mnevis Bull, which was required to be completely black. It was considered to be the manifestation of the Sun God Ra, and was depicted in art with the sun disc and uraeus between its horns [figure 3]. Because of the Mnevis Bull's solar connections, its cult was one of the few which was maintained during the Amarna Period (Wilkinson 2005:157). The cult of the Mnevis bull dates back to at least the Old Kingdom. In Utterance 307 of the Pyramid Texts the Mnevis bull cries, "I am the wild bull of the grassland, the great-faced bull which came out of On" (McInerney 2010:46).



Figure 3: The Mnevis bull.

### 2.3 The Buchis Bull

The Buchis Bull was worshipped at Thebes as the incarnation of the god Montu. Buchis was depicted as a bull and as a human figure with the head of a bull [figure 4]. According to the Buchis Stelae, Buchis was the heir as well as the father of the Ogdoad (Fairman 1934:3). The cult existed from the Twenty-sixth Dynasty until at least the reign of the Roman Emperor Diocletian in the late third and early fourth century CE. Buchis Bulls were interred in their own cemetery, called the Bucheion, at Armant (Allen 1936:169). The cult seems to have been localised, and to not have achieved nationwide status as those of the Apis and Mnevis Bulls did (Rice 1998:136).



Figure 4: The Buchis bull with the head of a bull and the body of a man.

## 2.4 Serapis

The cult of Serapis arose in the Ptolemaic Period. It was important in Egypt, and spread through the Roman Empire along with the cult of Isis. Serapis was a god of fertility and corn (Wilkinson 2005:222). He was formed through the syncretism of various gods such as Apis and Osiris, as well as various Greek gods like Zeus, Hades, Dionysus, Helios and Asklepios (Strudwick 2006:152). Serapis' main cult centre was at the Serapeum at Alexandria. In later art Serapis was portrayed as a bearded man with shoulder-length hair, but in Egypt he was depicted as a bull or a man with a bull's head. In either of these manifestations, Serapis wore a solar disc and uraeus between his horns. A triangle with its apex facing downward was found on his forehead<sup>2</sup> (Cartwright 1929:182). In more realistic depictions, this was represented as a triangular patch of fur. A Roman statue of the god found in Alexandria depicts a bull with this triangle formed from curls of hair.

## 2.5 The Sacred Bull Cult at Buto

An ivory label from Abydos records a royal visit to the Delta by Aha, the second ruler of the First Dynasty. The label is divided into four registers, the second of which has a depiction of what is usually interpreted as a bull in a net<sup>3</sup> [figure 5]. Wilkinson (1999:281;318-9) identifies it instead as a bull within a sacred enclosure. By analysing the iconography of other shrines depicted on the label, he reasons that the bull represents a sacred bull from a cult at Buto. He supports this conclusion by citing a pair of large pottery vessels sunk into the ground in front of a building at the site which he suggests functioned as feeding troughs for the sacred bull.

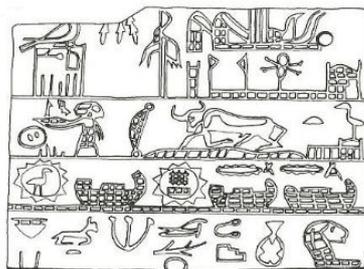


Figure 5: Label of Aha.



Figure 6: Osiris in the form of a bull bearing the deceased to the underworld.

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<sup>2</sup>See *Chapter 2: Decorative Bulls' Heads* for a discussion on the triangles which adorned bulls' heads.

<sup>3</sup>See *Chapter 5: The Royal Bull Hunt* for a discussion on a different interpretation for this register.

## 2.6 Osiris

After its death the Apis Bull was identified with Osiris, and was called Osiris-Apis or Osorapis. Osiris himself was known as the “Bull of the Underworld”, and “Bull of the West” (Rice 1998:144). These titles refer to his role as king of the realm of the dead, which the Egyptians believed to be in the west. After the weighing of the heart ritual, Osiris, in the form of a bull, carried the deceased on his back to the underworld [figure 6] (Cashford 2003:105).

Osiris was also worshipped in the Delta and called “Bull of Heaven”. The Bull of the Sky, or Bull of Heaven, was an ancient deity who is mentioned in the Pyramid Texts but falls into obscurity soon after. The Bull of Heaven is depicted in a Thirtieth Dynasty sculpture of Nectonebo. From the New Kingdom one of the planets was named “Horus, Bull of the Sky” (Wainwright 1933:45). It is uncertain whether the later references pertain to the same Pre- and Early Dynastic Bull of Heaven. It is also uncertain if the fact that Osiris bears the title “Bull of Heaven” means he can be associated with this early Bull of Heaven.

In Egypt several gods were identified with bulls through their epithets and likened or associated with them in texts. Gods were also represented as bulls not only in iconography, but also in life. The Apis, Mnevis and Buchis bulls were the earthly manifestations of Ptah, Ra and Montu respectively. These bulls were depicted in their true, bovine, form as well as in the form of a human with the head of a bull. There is little information about the sacred bull of Buto. It is uncertain whether the bull represented an anthropomorphic god, or if it was a divine being in and of itself. Mnevis, Buchis and Serapis were all identified with Apis. The Apis, in turn, was associated with Osiris after its death. Osiris is the only anthropomorphic Egyptian god which was depicted as a bull.

## 3. MESOPOTAMIA

The highest gods of the Mesopotamians were referred to as or associated with bulls. According to Rice (1998:88), the Sumerian gods Enlil and Ea were both celebrated as “Great Bull” and were said in sacred texts to have the bull’s most important characteristics of strength and fertility.

According to Waterman (1915:234), Ashur was also associated with the bull and Marduk was called the “young wild bull of the day”, apparently a reference to a role as a sun god. The Sun God himself, the Akkadian Shamash, was associated with the **gud-alim**, or Bison-Bull<sup>4</sup>, which represented the distant lands to which he travelled (Green 1995:1867).

Lahar and Šakkan were cattle gods in Sumerian mythology<sup>5</sup>, but there do not appear to be iconographic depictions of either god. Dumuzi was a shepherd god and the husband of Inanna. His name was often preceded by the epithet ‘Wild Bull’ which was a Sumerian metaphor for ‘shepherd’ (Sefati 1998:76). According to Jacobsen (1976:44), the title probably originally meant ‘cowherd’. Although never depicted as a bull in art and iconography, his identification with the bull in texts reveals the characteristics of the bull with which the gods were identified. A number of poems and songs recount the love and marriage of Inanna and Dumuzi. These are often expressed in pastoral terms and Dumuzi is often likened to a wild bull. In these texts it is Dumuzi’s virility which is compared to that of a bull.

### 3.1 The Storm Gods

The Storm God, identified in art by the forked lightning he holds, was known as Iškur in Sumerian and as Adad in Akkadian. Storm clouds were referred to as Adad’s ‘bull-calves’ (Black & Green 1992:111). According to Bienkowski and Millard (2000:2), Iškur’s animal was the lion-dragon, while Adad’s was the bull. According to Jacobsen (1976:135), however, the bull and the lion were both associated with Iškur as his early non-human forms, and, according to Smith (1994:339), the bull was the Storm God’s symbol, while the dragon was the god’s enemy. Iškur had certain similarities with the agricultural and rain god Ninurta: they were both represented as warrior gods who drove their chariots across the sky (Jacobsen 1976:135). Green (2003:23) demonstrates that during the Ur III Period Ninurta was associated with the lion, while Adad was associated with the bull. He argues that Storm Gods were associated with lions when

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<sup>4</sup>This term was used for the bull-man as well as for the human-headed bull. These beings are discussed in *Chapter 3: Contest Scenes* and *Chapter 11: The Bull and Composite Bull Figures as Protective Beings* respectively.

<sup>5</sup>In one text Lahar and his sister Ahnan, the grain goddess, argue with each other, proclaiming the advantages of their gifts and belittling those of the other (Kramer 1972:52). Šakkan features in *The Theogony of Dunnu*, also known as *The Harab Myth*, which describes the founding of the town of Dunnu and the genealogy of its gods (Dalley 2000:279).



The association between the bull and the Storm God is first attested during the Old Babylonian Period when forked lightning, symbolising the god, rested on the back of the beast. The bull could be either standing or recumbent. On the fourth register of the *Kudurru* of Meli-Shipak II<sup>7</sup> Adad is symbolised by two-forked lightning which stands on a platform on the back of a bull [figure 8].

The bull also supported the Storm God himself. Occasionally he is shown standing with one foot resting on the back of a small bull. The Stele of Adad, dating from the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III during the eighth century, was found in the Temple of Ishtar in Arslan Tash<sup>8</sup>, and is now housed in the Louvre [figure 9]. Adad is depicted holding three-forked lightning in either hand and standing in the smiting pose on the back of a bull. The Stele of Esarhaddon from Zincirli, and now in the Vorderasiatische Museum, depicts the Esarhaddon with a rope which is threaded through the lips of two vanquished kings. Above these kings are representations of symbols of the gods. Adad is shown as a god holding three-forked lightning and standing on a bull [figure 10].



Figure 8: Stele of Meli-Shipak (detail).



Figure 9: Stele of Adad from Arslan Tash.

The bull sometimes stood as an expression of Adad, and was used to represent the god. Under

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<sup>7</sup>Also discussed in *Chapter 6: The Horned Headdress of Divinity*.

<sup>8</sup>Although Arslan Tash is situated in modern day northern Syria and was the centre of an Aramaean Iron Age kingdom, this kingdom was conquered by the Assyrians in the ninth century, and this stele reflects Assyrian iconography. Similarly, the Stele of Esarhaddon (discussed below), although found in Zincirli southeastern Anatolia, also reflects Assyrian iconography. The two pieces are therefore discussed as Mesopotamian artefacts.

the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, the city of Babylon was rebuilt. The famous Processional Street and the Ishtar Gate, through which it passed, were lined with glazed blue bricks decorated with golden reliefs of animals sacred to the gods. The lion, Ishtar's sacred animal, interestingly does not decorate the Ishtar Gate but is found instead on the Processional Way. The walls of the Ishtar Gate have alternating rows of dragons, which were sacred to Marduk, the god of the state and city, and bulls, which were symbolic of Adad [figure 11]. The gateway had bronze-plated cedar doors and bronze statues of bulls and dragons (Kunze, Jakob-Rost, Klengel-Brandt, Marzahn & Warkte 1995:50).



Figure 10: Adad on a bull on the Stele of Esarhaddon.



Figure 11: Bull representing Adad from the Ishtar Gate of Babylon.

### 3.2 The Moon God

Inscriptions from the Old Babylonian Period inform us that the crescent moon was identified with the Moon God Sin (Black & Green 1992:54). The horns of the bull came to signify the crescent of the moon, which lies almost horizontally, like the horns of the bull, in the skies of Mesopotamia (Black *et al* 2006:145). The bull, the crescent moon, and the Moon God therefore became associated with each other. In Sumerian this god was known as Nanna, Suen, or sometimes as Nanna-Suen. In Akkadian he was called Sin. His epithets included *ašimbabbar*, which means 'the luminous', referring to the bright moon, *amar*, which means 'calf', and *amar.ban.da<sup>d</sup>en.lil.a*, which means 'young calf of Enlil' (Leick 1998:126). Associated with cattle herds, and with agricultural fertility in general, Nanna was also worshipped as the patron deity of herdsmen. According to Jacobsen (1976:124), he was originally envisaged as a bull, but in time his human form came to dominate and he became the 'cowherd'.

On an Early Dynastic whitestone plaque from Nippur<sup>9</sup> a crescent moon is found just above the depiction of the bull [figure 12], demonstrating that there was already a connection between the bull and the moon at this period. Two bulls' heads from the Early Dynastic Temple of Ninhursag at Ubaid<sup>10</sup> displayed a crescent on their foreheads [figure 13], further identifying them with the moon, and by extension with the Moon God. The crescent moon, the bull and the Moon God were then already associated with each other as early as the Early Dynastic Period.

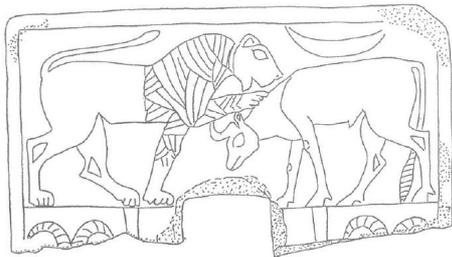


Figure 12: Whitestone plaque from Nippur.



Figure 13: Bull's head from Ubaid.

A wall painting from Room 132 of the Palace at Mari shows an enormous black bull behind the Moon God, identifiable by the crescent on the top of his headdress, who is seated on a throne [figure 14] (Matthews 1997:149). The bull and Moon God are a scale pattern which symbolises the mountains, which, according to Ornan (2001:12) “in Mesopotamian iconography implies a heavenly setting”. According to Bennett and Keel (1999:35) the black bull may embody the night time mountains. What is clear is that the bull is associated with the Moon God.

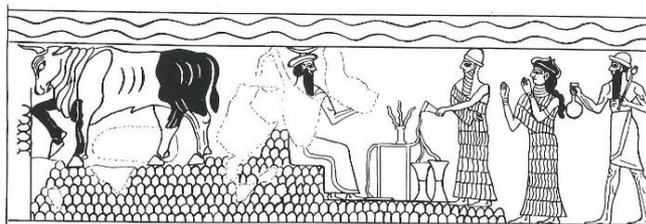


Figure 14: Wall painting from Mari.

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<sup>9</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 3: Contest Scenes*.

<sup>10</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 2: Decorative Bulls' Heads*.

Baked clay plaques have been found with depictions of two crossed bulls [figure 15]. Between the bulls is a crescent mounted on a conical base. That the crescent symbolises the Moon God is supported by cylinder seals depicting a god who is holding a crescent on a pole, and is standing on two crossed bulls. One such cylinder seal, from the Old Babylonian Period, depicts the Moon God standing on two recumbent bulls as well as the Storm God standing on one bull [figure 16]. The bull therefore must have been recognised to be representative of both gods (Ornan 2001:15).



Figure 15: Plaque with crossed bulls.



Figure 16: Old Babylonian seal impression with both the Storm God and the Moon God standing on bulls.

Two stamp seals from the eighth or seventh century, one from Nineveh [figure 17] and one of unknown provenance [figure 18], depict a bull and a crescent on a pole, representing the Moon God. The crescent on the pole appears to stand on the bull's back, much like the lightning which was symbolic of the Storm God (Ornan 2001:19-21).



Figure 17: Stamp seal from Nineveh.



Figure 18: Stamp seal of unknown provenance.

Although many gods were referred to or likened to bulls in Mesopotamian texts, it was the Storm God and the Moon God who were actually associated with bulls in Mesopotamian iconography. There is no direct evidence to support the hypothesis, but bucrania depicted on Halaf pottery may represent the Storm God. The bull is associated with the Storm God in texts and iconography from the Old Babylonian Period, and if the god was represented as a bull during the Halaf Period, one would expect a continuation in this iconographic tradition. The association between the Storm God and the bull manifested itself in three forms. The bull acted as a support for the lightning bolt, the symbol of the god, as is seen on the Kudurru of Meli-Shipak II. The bull could also serve as the attendant of the god, usually bearing the god on its back like it does on the Stele of Adad. The bull could also stand as a representative for the god, as on the Ishtar Gate. In this case the bull is not a manifestation of the Storm God, but, as the god's divine animal, is representative of him. The Storm God was therefore never depicted as a bull in Mesopotamian iconography.

The bull was also associated with the Moon God. The plaque from Nippur and the bulls' heads from Ubaid demonstrate that this relationship already existed as early as the Early Dynastic Period. These early depictions associate the bull with the moon, and a connection with the Moon God is therefore implicit. In contrast, this relationship is explicitly demonstrated in the wall painting from Mari in which the bull is shown directly behind the seated Moon God. Two crossed bulls were associated with the crescent moon on plaques as well as cylinder seals. The Old Babylonian cylinder seal reveals that two crossed bulls denoted the Moon God, while one bull denoted the Storm God. The bull was found in association with the crescent until the first millennium.

The relationship between the bull and the Moon God appears to have been earlier than that between the bull and the Storm God. Both lasted until during the first millennium, but the Storm God's association with the bull was more prevalent and more celebrated.

## 4. ANATOLIA

### 4.1 The Storm God

According to Green (2003:283), the Storm God first appeared in Anatolia during the Prehistoric Period as a bull and continued as such until the late third to early second millennium. After this, he was portrayed primarily in human form, but there were still instances where he was depicted as a bull.

The Storm God Teshub's place at the head of the Hurrian and Hittite pantheons is expressed by his epithet "king of heaven" (Leick 1998:157). Teshub is the god's Hurrian name. His Luwian and Hittite name is Tarhunta. Local gods were identified with and assimilated to this Storm God. He was also worshipped in Syria and in Mesopotamia, where he was known as Tishpak. His sacred animal was the bull, and he is often shown standing in a chariot drawn by bulls (McMahon 1995:1990). The Hattian counterpart to Teshub was Taru. His name is related to the Greek *tauros* and the Celtic *tarvos*, both meaning "bull" (Motz 1997:29). Taru is represented in myths like *The Moon that Fell From Heaven* and *The Song of the Bull* (Green 2003:134). *The Song of the Bull* was sung in rituals of Nerik, a town dedicated to the Storm God (Motz 1997:29).

#### 4.1.1 *The Bull Standards from Alaçahöyük*

A group of ten bronze standards dating to the late third millennium was found at Alaçahöyük, each one in a separate tomb. Seven of these represented bulls [figure 19], while three represented stags (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:284). The bulls have long arching horns, and some have silver inlaid spots on the body, stripes on the haunches, or a triangle on the forehead<sup>11</sup> (Canby 1995:166). Further examples have been found at places outside Alaçahöyük, such as Horoztepe. Although conventionally referred to as standards, the exact purpose of these objects is uncertain. Kohlmeyer (1995:2643) suggests that they could have served as cultic standards, or to decorate altars or chariots. Frankfort (1996:210) argues that they could not have had a military function, because they were found exclusively in tombs of women. It is most likely that they had some religious function or significance. This can be supported by the fact that they were found in a mortuary context. The bull and stag were both taken over into later Hittite religion where they became theriomorphic representations of deities, or the associated animal of a deity (Kohlmeyer

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<sup>11</sup>See *Chapter 2: Decorative Bulls' Heads* for a discussion on the possible meaning of this triangle.

1995:2643). Aruz & Wallenfels (2003:284) believe the bull standards to represent the Storm God, while the stag was a protective deity in later Hittite texts.



Figure 19: Bull standard from Alaçahöyük.

#### 4.1.2 *The Alaçahöyük Reliefs*

An orthostat from Alaçahöyük, dating to the fourteenth century and now in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations in Ankara, bears a relief which depicts the king and queen conducting a ritual before a deity in the form of a bull on a pedestal [figure 20]. Before this pedestal is an altar made from a cylindrical slab on top of a conical base<sup>12</sup>. Behind the king and queen, on a separate slab, a priest leads two files of sacrificial animals. According to McMahon (1995:1990) the deity represented by the bull is the Storm God.



Figure 20: Relief from Alaçahöyük depicting the Storm God in the form of a bull.



Figure 21: Relief from Alaçahöyük depicting the Storm God in the form of a human.

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<sup>12</sup>An example of this kind of altar is known from Emirgazi in south central modern day Turkey (Kohlmeyer 1995:2645).

Another Alaçahöyük relief shows the Storm God in his human form being worshipped by a king [figure 21]. According to Green (2003:109), the Storm God was first envisaged as a bull, and seal impressions depicting a Storm God either accompanied by a bull or killing a bull may represent an attempt to have the human form of the god replace the earlier, nonhuman form. The reliefs at Alaçahöyük, however, clearly demonstrate that the two concepts of the Storm God, that of him as a bull, and that of him as a human, coexisted in the official religion at least during this period.

#### 4.1.3 *Sheri and Hurri, the Bulls of the Storm God*

The Storm God was not only depicted as a bull, the bull was also his sacred animal. Pairs of large clay bulls or bull vessels have been found at Boğazköy [figure 22] and İnandıktepe, and fragments of another pair have been found at Maşat Höyük. They have been dated to the Hittite Empire Period, circa the sixteenth century (Aruz et al 2008:189). The bulls are meant to be a pair, and are believed to represent Sheri and Hurri<sup>13</sup>, the bulls of the Storm God in Hurrian and Imperial Hittite cult (Macqueen 1986:104). Their function as attendants to the Storm God is verified in texts from Kültepe from the Assyrian Colony Period (Green 2003:111). Sheri and Hurri's names are of Hurrian origin and mean 'Day' and 'Night'. They grazed on destroyed cities, and they were invoked in treaties and oaths, and they were asked in prayers to intercede with the Storm God (Leick 1998:151). The two bulls were subordinate to the Storm God, but they appear to have still been divine figures in their own right (Bunnens 2006:69). The ceramic bulls and bull vessels would have been used in rituals for the Storm God. The bulls from İnandıktepe were found with a terracotta model of a shrine, suggesting that they were originally kept in the city's temple (Aruz et al 2008:189).

The reliefs which decorate Chamber A of Yazılıkaya<sup>14</sup> depict two processions, one primarily of gods, the other primarily of goddesses, which converge in a central panel [figure 23]. On this panel the principal god and goddess, emphasised by their greater size and their position, face each other (Macqueen 1986:124). The god is identified as Teshub, and he stands on two mountain gods. He is followed by the Storm God of Hattusas, who is depicted here as a lesser deity (Green

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<sup>13</sup>Hurri was also called Tilla (Bunnens 2006:69).

<sup>14</sup>Also discussed in *Chapter 6: The Horned Headdress of Divinity*.

2003:122). The goddess is identified as Hebat, Teshub's wife. Behind her stands Sharumma, who, like his mother in front of him, stands on a lion (Sagona & Zimansky 2009:279). Teshub's two bulls accompany the god, one standing beside him, the other beside Hebat.



Figure 22: Bull vessels from Boğazköy representing Sheri and Hurri.



Figure 23: Relief from Chamber A of Yazilikaya (detail).

The pair of divine bulls is not only portrayed alongside the Storm God, but is also shown drawing his chariot. A relief from İmamkulu, dating to the Imperial Period, depicts prince Kuwatnamuwa standing among many deities [figure 24] (Kohlmeyer 1995:2653). In this relief the Storm God stands in his chariot which is drawn by his bulls and appears over the personified mountains. The Storm God is identified in an inscription, but the exact meaning of this inscription, as well as the relief, is unclear (Green 2003:124). The motif of the Storm God in a chariot drawn by his bulls is also found at Arslantepe [figure 25]. A relief from the Lion Gate shows king PUGNUS-mili making a libation before the Storm God (Sagona & Zimansky 2009:303). Inscriptions clearly identify both the Storm God and the king (Green 2003:123). The Storm God approaches on the left in his chariot, which is drawn by his two bulls, Sheri and Hurri, and then receives the king's libation. On the right, behind the king, another figure leads a bull for offering. At Aleppo the Storm God is shown in the process of mounting his chariot which in this case is only drawn by one bull.

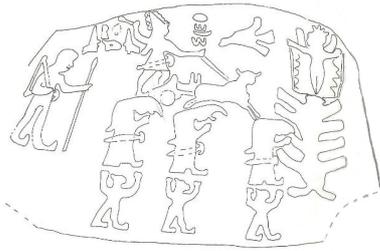


Figure 24: Relief from Imamkulu.



Figure 25: Relief from Arslantepe.

Dating to the Neo-Hittite Period are a series of statues carved in the form of two bulls. A stone altar from Savcılı<sup>15</sup> shaped like a bull with two heads most likely represents the divine pair of bulls [figure 26]. Examples from Karatepe, Carchemish [figure 27] and Domuztepe functioned as bases for statues of the Storm God. The double bull-base from Karatepe bears an inscription by Azitawada, vizier of Awarik, king of the Adanites, and was found in association with a statue of the Storm God in a holy precinct (Beyerlin 1978:240-1). The double-bull base from Carchemish, dating to the reign of Katuwas during the first half of the ninth century, was found in the Temple of the Storm God (Winter 1979:126).



Figure 26: Stone altar from Savcılı.



Figure 27: Double-bull base from Carchemish.

In 1997 a statue of the Storm God standing upright in a chariot drawn by his two bulls was found at Çineköy in Adana Province [figure 28]. It dates to the eighth century and is now in the Adana Museum. This statue is unique in being the only depiction in the round of the Storm God riding in his bull-drawn chariot.

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<sup>15</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 9: Bull Sacrifice*.



Figure 28: Statue of the Storm God in a chariot drawn by Sheri and Hurri from Çineköy.

#### 4.1.4 *The Storm God Standing on A Bull*

Stelae dating to the Neo-Hittite Period have been found depicting a smiting Storm God standing on a bull. Two stelae from Tell Ahmar depict the Storm God in the smiting pose striding on a bull. In both stelae the god has a sword at his waist and holds triple-forked lightning in his left hand. On one of the stelae he holds an axe in his right hand [figure 29]. It appears that the figure on the second stele also held an axe in his right hand, but that it has been removed. A stele from Djekke in modern day northern Syria dating to circa 750 depicts the Storm God and has a dedication in Hittite hieroglyphs [figure 30] (Amiet 1980:453). The Storm God holds a triple-forked lightning bolt in one hand and stands on a bull.



Figure 29: Tell Ahmar Stele.



Figure 30: Djekke Stele.



Figure 31: Broken Stele from Gölpınar.

A stele of unknown provenance, now in the Aleppo National Museum, a stele from Tilhalit and another from Gölpınar [figure 31] are now broken, with only the bottom half remaining. These all date circa the ninth century and depict a figure, of which only the lower half is visible, standing on a bull.

The *bît hilani* of Kaparu at Tell Halaf has three columns shaped as deities on their sacred animals. The Storm God stands in the centre on a bull, while his wife and son stand on either side of him on lions [figure 32].



Figure 32: Reconstruction of the *bît hilani* of Kaparu at Tell Halaf at the National Museum of Aleppo.

The Storm God in these depictions is shown standing on one bull, while the Hittite Storm God is usually associated with his two bulls, Sheri and Hurri. According to Bunnens (2006:70), this bull may represent Būru, ‘Bull-Calf’, a divine figure named in texts from the late second millennium, and the Neo-Hittite depictions therefore probably don’t derive from the earlier Hittite examples. They appear to have more similarities with depictions of the Mesopotamian and Levantine Storm Gods.

#### 4.2 Sharruma

Kuwatnamuwa, the prince identified on the relief at İmamkulu, is also depicted on a relief at Hanyeri [figure 33]. The prince faces a bull standing on a mountain god and an altar. An inscription identifies the bull as the god Sharruma (Kohlmeyer 1995:2653). He was the son of Teshub and Hebat and was referred to as “the strong bull-calf” (Leick 1998:150) and “mighty

king of the mountains” (Kohlmeyer 1995:2653). This relief is important because it demonstrates that, although in the vast majority of examples it is the Storm God that is associated with the bull, he is not the only god who is so identified.

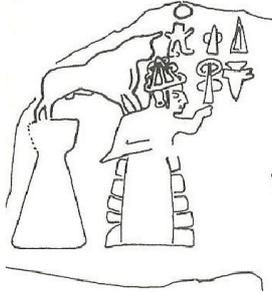


Figure 33: Hanyeri Relief.



Figure 34: Stamp seal impression from Boğazköy

Stamp seal impressions from Boğazköy from the second half of the thirteenth century depict a bull or bull's head beneath a crescent [figure 34] (Bernett & Keel 1998:37). When the association between the bull and the Moon God in Mesopotamia and the Levant<sup>16</sup> are taken into consideration, it becomes apparent that these impressions reveal a relationship between the bull and the Moon God in Hittite Anatolia.

There appears to be a clear development of the relationship between the Storm God and the bull in Anatolia. Bronze standards from late third millennium Alaçahöyük in the form of bulls may be early representations of the Storm God. The Storm God was depicted in both human and bull form during the fourteenth century at Alaçahöyük, and it is possible that the bronze standards were an early predecessor of this tradition. The Storm God was not only depicted as a bull, but he had two bulls as his divine animals. These bulls were named Sheri and Hurri, and are depicted alongside the Storm God as well as drawing his chariot in both relief sculpture and sculpture in the round. By the Neo-Hittite Period, the Storm God is depicted standing on only one bull. This bull may represent a separate divine figure called Būru. The relief from Aleppo in which only one bull draws the Storm God's chariot may also represent Būru. The Storm God

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<sup>16</sup>Discussed below.

was therefore depicted as a bull in the earlier periods, and in later periods he was depicted with the bull as his divine animal. These bulls, Sheri, Hurri and Būru, represent divine beings in their own right. The Alaçahöyük reliefs represent the point in this evolution in which the portrayal of the Storm God as a bull was coming to an end, and his portrayal in human form was becoming more popular.

The god Sharruma was depicted as a bull at Hanyeri. It is possible that he inherited this relationship with the bull from his father, the Storm God. This relief reveals that the Storm God, although by far the most important Anatolian deity to be associated with the bull, was not alone in this association. Seal impressions suggest that the Moon God was also associated with the bull.

## 5. THE LEVANT

### 5.1 El

In the mythological texts of Ugarit, the major deities took on the appearance of cows and bulls. El and Baal were represented as “divine bulls”, El as an adult bull, and Baal as a young bull, or Bull Calf, and Anat<sup>17</sup> as a heifer (Aruz et al 2008:243). This identification of the Ugaritic divinities with cattle in texts is not well represented in iconography.

El was the head of the Ugaritic pantheon, ruling over both gods and men. This role is reflected in his title ‘Father Bull’ (Miller & Miller 1973:82). His titles ‘Lord of the Earth’ and ‘Bull El’ refer to his function as god of creation and fertility (Beyerlin 1978:199; Green 2003:217). There is no textual or iconographic evidence identifying El as a Storm God, but his characterization as a bull implies that he shared certain fertility functions with Storm Gods such as the Syrian Hadad and Hittite Teshub (Miller & Miller 1973:154; Green 2003:207). There are no artistic depictions of El represented as or associated with a bull. Still, El was “regarded as the bull-god” (Curtis 1990:21).

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<sup>17</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses*.

## 5.2 The Storm God

Although he was not given the title “Bull”, as El was, it is evident that the Canaanite Storm God Baal was associated with bull symbolism. The bull, as Kapelrud (1952:21) states, “stood for Baal, and Baal for all the bull meant in ancient thought<sup>18</sup>.” In *The Baal Cycle* Baal is compared to a wild bull, while in *The Loves of Baal and Anat*<sup>19</sup> he is actually represented as one. Numerous statues of bronze and gold have been excavated across the Levant which depict a striding young god, believed to represent Baal, who raises his arm above his head<sup>20</sup>. They are often found in association with statuettes of bulls, which may represent the animal form of this god (Aruz et al 2008:246). According to Green (2003:207), Baal may have been conceived of as a Bull God. There is, however, no direct evidence that Baal was originally depicted as a bull in early Canaanite art and iconography. Curtis (1990:17) and Cornelius (1994:165) suggest that depictions of Baal wearing a horned headdress identify him as a Bull God. Many deities wore horned headdress<sup>21</sup>, and this by itself cannot be taken as proof that Baal was associated with the bull.

Although not depicted as a bull, Baal was sometimes depicted on seals as standing on a bull, or holding the reins of a bull (Mazar 1982:32). A unique statue from Hazor, a site about 16 kilometres north of the Sea of Galilee, represents a god standing on a bull [figure 35]. The statue is badly broken, but a crescent and disc emblem is visible on the god’s chest. Burnett and Keel (1998:37) suggest this statue represents a Storm God with lunar traits.

The most compelling iconographic evidence that Baal was associated with the Bull comes from Phoenician seals from the eighth to sixth century which depict a god with a bull’s head smiting a foe or seated on a throne [figure 37]. Ornan (2001:23) identifies this god as the Storm God. These are related to a thirteenth century stele which is now housed in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen. A winged god with the head of a bull is in striding smiting position [figure 36].

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<sup>18</sup>The association between Baal and the bull is so great that Meek (1921:119) argues that in some cases the term *baal* refers not to the Canaanite Storm God, but to an “Israelitish bull god”.

<sup>19</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 8: The Cow and the Goddesses*.

<sup>20</sup>He most likely would be hurling a thunderbolt, much like similar Greek statues of Zeus.

<sup>21</sup>An example being Resheph (Cornelius 1994:247).

Cornelius (1994:247) identifies this figure as Baal and suggests “some Cretan influence”. The text inscribed on the stele mentions, “Seth, the bull of Ombos”, but, according to Ornan (2001:22-23), the style of the bull’s head and the Asiatic kilt signify a “Canaanite inspiration and corroborate the identification of the figure with Ba‘al-Seth”.



Figure 35: Statue from Hazor.



Figure 36: Copenhagen relief.

Baal and Hadad were identified with each other and were called Baal-Hadad (Leick 1998:18). According to Albright (1936:10) and Patai (1965:44), Hadad was this god’s proper name, while Baal, meaning “lord”, was his epithet and was the name by which he was generally known. There are some scholars though who hold the view that the two deities are distinct from each other (Gray 1951:146).



Figure 37: Phoenician stamp seals depicting the Storm God with the head of a bull.

Adad was worshipped in Syria as Hadad or Ramman. Ramman means ‘the Bellower’, which Wainwright (1933:44) believes to be related to the Assyrian word *rîmu*, meaning ‘wild ox’ or ‘thunderer’. This god was depicted in art standing on a bull and armed with lightning bolts, and he is often accompanied by a bull or a pair of bulls (Green 2003:161). He was the head of the pantheon of most of the Aramaean world, including cities such as Sam’al and Damascus (Dion 1995:1291).

### 5.3 The Moon God

A stele from Tell el-Ash‘ari in modern day southwestern Syria and now in the Damascus Museum depicts a stylised figure with a bull’s head and with a sword or dagger at the waist [figure 38]. An almost identical stele was found in a gate shrine at Bethsaida on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee, and dates to the Iron Age II [figure 39] (Lewis 2005:76). The Damascus Museum example has a rosette between the horns, and appears to wear earrings, while the Bethsaida example is, except for the blade, unadorned. A third stele in the Gazian Tepe Museum in south east Turkey depicts the same subject, this time the representation being very angular and with no sword [figure 40].



Figure 38: Tell el-Ash‘ari relief.



Figure 39: Bethsaida relief.



Figure 40: Gazian Tepe relief.

Gray (1969:73) suggests that this figure represents Baal. Lipiński (2000:634) agrees that it may depict the Storm God, but warns that “this interpretation is not confirmed by any inscription.” Bennett and Keel (1998) argue extensively that the figure does not represent Baal, but the Moon

God. They argue that the Storm God was portrayed as standing on the bull, and the iconography of a bull's head can be better associated with the Moon God. In addition, they demonstrate that the sword accompanied anthropomorphic representations of the Moon God. The sword worn by this figure then suggests the figure is a Moon God, for if a Storm God was depicted, lightning would have been a more apt accompanying weapon. One problem with their hypothesis is that Baal was depicted in human form with the head of a bull<sup>22</sup>, but there are no known examples of the Moon God being represented in this way. Because of the preeminence of the Storm God in Canaan, and because the stelae associate the bull with both Storm God and Moon God iconography, Ornan (2001:25) suggests that they depict a “storm deity with lunar features”.



Figure 41: Stamp seal from Lachish.

A stamp seal from Lachish, produced in the Middle Bronze Age and used again circa 900, bears an impression of a bull below a crescent and full moon [figure 41] (Bernett & Keel 1998:37). This and similar depictions reveal that the bull was associated with the moon, and by extension the Moon God, and not only a hybrid of the Storm and Moon Gods.

#### 5.4 The Golden Calves of the Bible

There are two references of bull-worship in the Bible. The first is the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32 in which Aaron makes the impatient Israelites an image of a calf to worship when Moses delays coming down from Mount Sinai. When Moses descends from the Mount, he learns what has happened and destroys the Golden Calf and punishes the people. The second reference is the installation of the Golden Calves at Dan and Bethel by Jeroboam in 1 Kings 12. Upon the

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<sup>22</sup>Although these date to a later period than the stelae from Bethsaida, Tell el-Ash'ari and Gazian Tepe. See the Phoenician seals and the Copenhagen stele discussed above.

death of Solomon, Jeroboam separated from the Southern Kingdom, and to prevent the people from going to Jerusalem, he set up shrines in Dan and Bethel in North Israel. The Levites were deposed from the priesthood, and the Aaronites returned to power (Meek 1921:129).

There has been much debate over the meaning of this cult. The word used in the Old Testament is *regel*, which not only means “calf”, as it has been translated, but also “young bull” (Wainwright 1933:46). As many gods of the ancient Near East were associated with the bull, most scholars believe the calves to have represented some deity. Others argue that the calves may have constituted a pedestal upon which a statue of a god would have stood (Miller & Miller 1973:87).

Because the Israelites left Egypt on their way to their promised land, it has been suggested that the Golden Calves were identified with an Egyptian deity. These include Ra and Osiris who were both worshipped as bulls in the Delta, an area through which the Israelites would have passed (Miller & Miller 1973:154). Scholars such as Whatham (1899:300) and Murray (1953:151) are of the opinion that the Golden Calves represented Apis while others, such as Danelius (1967:112) argue the possibility of them representing Hathor. The claim for Hathor is apparently supported by the fact that she was worshipped in the Sinai through which the Israelites travelled. However, because Hathor is a goddess, and the calves were masculine, she cannot be the deity which they represented.

Jeroboam had recently returned from Egypt when he set up the Golden Calves at Dan and Bethel. This seems to support the proposal that they represented an Egyptian god or gods (Pfeiffer 1926:217). However, because the bull was associated with the god that brought the Israelites out of Egypt, it is generally recognised that the Golden Calves could therefore not have been derived from an Egyptian god (Ward 1909:181). Moreover, in Egypt when a god was worshipped in the form of a bull, this bull was a living animal, not merely an image<sup>23</sup> (Miller & Miller 1973:87). The Golden Calves would then rather have represented a symbol of a Semitic god (Paton 1894:81).

Because of the association between Baal and the bull, the Golden Calf has been thought to

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<sup>23</sup>See above.

represent this god. 2 Kings 10:25-29 describes how Jehu wiped out the worship of Baal in Israel, destroying images of the god, razing his temples and killing all of Baal's worshippers, while continuing the worship of the Golden Calves at Dan and Bethel. The Golden Calves could clearly then not have represented Baal.

In Exodus 32:4, when Aaron presents the Golden Calf to the people, he announces that they represent "your gods, O Israel, that brought you up from Egypt." This is repeated almost exactly in 1 Kings 12:28 when Jeroboam presents his Golden Calves: "here are your gods, Israel, that brought you up from Egypt." The Golden Calves must therefore have represented the god of the Israelites and not some foreign deity. This is further substantiated in Exodus 32:5 when Aaron "built an altar in front of it and issued this proclamation, 'Tomorrow there is to be a pilgrim-feast to the Lord.'" The Golden Calves therefore must have represented or been associated with the god of the Israelites.

Meek (1921:119) argues that the Israelites were originally bull worshippers and that when Yahweh became their chief god the Israelites denounced their earlier beliefs. The story of the Golden Calf is therefore both a memory of, and a polemic against, this earlier cult. However, Yahweh is frequently described in the Bible as a Storm God (Stratton Smith 1995:2035) and may be identified as or associated with the golden calves. Because Baal and Yahweh were both identified as Storm Gods, whatever the official religion expounded, in the popular religion the two gods were worshipped as one and the same god (Schaeffer 2000:106). Baal worship was assimilated into the cult of Yahweh, and as Baal was worshipped and identified as a bull, Yahweh become so as well. In this way, Yahweh came to be officially worshipped in Israel under the form of a bull (Waterman 1915:229) and it is quite possible that the Golden Calves represented Yahweh.

It has been suggested that the Golden Calves were not meant to be images representing a god, but that they were used as bases to support the throne of an invisible god<sup>24</sup> (Miller & Miller 1973:87). It is uncertain why such a pedestal would have been condemned when the inner sanctum of the Temple of Solomon contained statues of cherubim<sup>25</sup>, and two smaller figures of

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<sup>24</sup>The god would have been invisible because of the Biblical image ban.

<sup>25</sup>Cherubim are discussed in *Chapter 11: The Bull and Composite Bull Figures as Protective Beings*.

cherubim were placed on the Ark of the Covenant. It seems more likely then that the Golden Calves did not constitute pedestals, but that they represented the deity himself. When the Biblical image ban is taken into consideration, it becomes apparent that the fault was not necessarily that Yahweh was represented as a bull, but that he was represented at all<sup>26</sup>.

El was identified as 'Father Bull' in texts, but he was never depicted as a bull. Both the Storm God and the Moon God were identified or associated with the bull in iconographic sources. In some cases, such as the reliefs from Tell el-Ash'ari, Bethsaida and Gazian Tepe, the bull can be associated with both gods. Bull figurines were found in association with statuettes believed to represent Baal. Baal was identified with the bull in texts such as *The Loves of Baal and Anat*, and, although not certain, these bull figurines may represent this god's animal form. In rare examples from later periods Baal was depicted with a human body and a bull's head. Yahweh was described as a Storm God and the Golden Calves of Old Testament literature can be identified with him, either as representing him or being his divine animal.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Many gods were associated with or likened to the bull in texts, but few were represented as the bull in iconographic sources. Egypt is unique in the ancient Near East in its treatment of the relationship between the bull and the gods, because the gods were not only represented as bulls in texts and iconography, but the Apis, Mnevis and Buchis bulls were believed to be actual living embodiments of the gods. If the Aha label depicts a bull cult at Buto, this bull would also have been a living animal. Osiris is the only Egyptian god usually depicted in the form of a human who was represented as a bull.

Several Mesopotamian gods were identified as or likened to the bull in texts, but only the Storm and Moon Gods were associated with them in iconography. The relationships between these gods and the bull were manifested in different ways. The lightning bolt, symbolic of the Storm God, was depicted mounted on the back of the bull. The Storm God was similarly depicted as

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<sup>26</sup>It is interesting to note that every reference to bull worship in the Old Testament locates it in the Northern Kingdom (Meek 1921:120), and, although bulls may have been regarded as images of Yahweh in Israel, they were not so regarded in the Southern Kingdom (Pfeiffer 1926:216). The stories of the Golden Calves could therefore have been religious and political polemics by the South against the North.

standing on the back of the bull. The bulls which decorated the Ishtar Gate were representative of the Storm God. While the Storm God was depicted standing on one bull, the Moon God was represented standing on two crossed bulls. These crossed bulls also decorated plaques where they were found in association with the crescent moon. The bull is found behind the Moon God on the wall painting from Mari. The relationship between the Moon God and the bull appears to be older than that of the Storm God and the bull. The earliest evidence of the crescent moon being associated with the bull comes from the Early Dynastic Period, while the Storm God appears to be first associated with the bull during the Old Babylonian Period. Despite this, the Storm God is more famously associated with the bull.

The Anatolian Storm God's relationship with the bull appears to have evolved over the millennia. During the late third millennium, bronze standards from Alaçahöyük appear to represent the god as a bull. By the fourteenth century the Storm God is depicted in both human and animal form at Alaçahöyük. He is also shown in association with Sheri and Hurri, his two divine bulls. By the Neo-Hittite Period the Storm God is depicted on one bull. This bull may represent a separate divine being called Būru. The Storm God was therefore originally envisaged as a bull, which is the only instance outside Egypt when this occurred. Sheri, Hurri and Būru were associated with the Storm God, but they were also separate divine beings, and are the only known divine bulls of this sort in the ancient Near East. While Egypt also had divine bulls, these bulls were the earthly manifestation of other gods. Sher, Hurri and Būru are therefore unique in ancient Near Eastern ideology. Although very rare, other gods were also depicted with or as bulls. These include Sharruma, who was the son of the Storm God, and perhaps inherited the relationship from his father, and the Moon God. It is notable that the bull was depicted in association with the crescent moon in Hittite Anatolia, because the Storm God and the Moon God were the gods with which the bull was associated in Mesopotamia and the Levant.

El is consistently portrayed as 'Father Bull' in Ugaritic texts, but was never depicted as a bull in art and iconography. Statuettes of Baal were found in association with figurines of bulls, and suggest a connection between the Storm God and the bull. The Storm God, in the guise of both Baal and Hadad, was also depicted standing on the bull. The Golden Calves from Biblical narratives most likely represent a mount of this sort for the Israelite god Yahweh, who was frequently described as a Storm God in the Bible. In depictions from the later periods, the Storm God was represented not only associated with the bull, but with the body of a human and the

head of a bull, much like the Egyptian depictions of the Apis and Buchis bulls. The Levantine Moon God was also associated with the bull. While the stamp seal from Lachish depicts a bull associated with moon imagery, the reliefs from Tell el-Ash'ari, Bethsaid and Gazian depict an amalgamation of the Storm and Moon gods.

The ancient Near Eastern gods most commonly associated with the bull were therefore the Storm and Moon gods. The Anatolian Storm God was the only god to be depicted in the form of a bull, and is also the only god known to have had his chariot drawn by bulls. Besides the Egyptian deities, the Levantine Storm God is the only god who was depicted with the body of a human and with the head of a bull. This may reflect Egyptian influence. Similarly, the Neo-Hittite images of the Storm God standing on the back of a bull may represent the diffusion of this motif from both Mesopotamia and the Levant. When these gods and their relationship with the bull are examined, it becomes evident that the gods were identified with similar gods from other areas of the ancient Near East, and, although there were separate deities with their own histories and peculiarities, that they did not stand in isolation. Because the religions of the peoples of the ancient Near East were so interwoven with all aspects of their lives, the association with their gods is perhaps the most significant manifestation of the importance of the bull in the ancient Near East.

## CHAPTER 8: THE COW AND THE GODDESSES

*It is rare to find goddesses portrayed as or associated with cows and bulls. Those which are, are usually goddesses of fertility or motherhood. Goddesses, particularly from Egypt, but also from the Levant, Mesopotamia and Anatolia, are studied to reveal similarities and differences in how their relationship with cattle was depicted.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

While ancient Near Eastern gods were associated with bulls, goddesses were associated with cows<sup>1</sup>. The cows with which these goddesses were associated did not represent the peaceful domesticated animals, but the great wild cows. These animals were considered to be very dangerous, but their aggressive protection of their young was also recognised and admired. The cow therefore came to symbolise fertility as well as maternal protective power (Wilkinson 1999:262). Goddesses who were associated with or identified as cows therefore embodied these characteristics, and were generally Mother Goddesses or goddesses of fertility.

On rare occasions goddesses were also associated with bulls. Goddesses from Egypt, the Levant, Mesopotamia and Anatolia, as well as how their associations with cows and bulls, will be examined to reveal similarities and differences in the representations of these relationships in iconographic sources.

### 2. THE MOTIF OF THE COW AND THE CALF

The cow with her calf was a common motif across the ancient Near East from the third millennium onward, and appears to have been particularly popular among artists of the ninth and eighth centuries (Dever 1984:27). The cow is shown turning to her calf which is suckling at her side. Depictions of a cow suckling her calf were produced in many materials, most famous of these being ivory inlays [figure 1]. As early as the end of the third millennium the cow and calf motif was found in scenes where it was placed at any level in the field, sometimes without a

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<sup>1</sup>Goddesses were more commonly associated with lions than with cows. The association between the goddess and big cats can be traced as early as the Neolithic Period and can be proved by statuettes from Çatalhöyük. In later periods, Inanna/Ishtar's animal attribute was the lion, which symbolised her power and ferocity as both goddess of love and war, while Sekhmet was a destructive sun-goddess who took on the form of a woman with a lioness's head.

ground-line to support it. According to Van Buren (1945:36), this reveals that the motif already represented a symbol as opposed to a depiction from the natural world. Some examples of the motif therefore appear to have had symbolic significance, while others may have been purely decorative.



Figure 1. Eighth century ivory plaque of a cow and calf plaque from Arslan Tash.

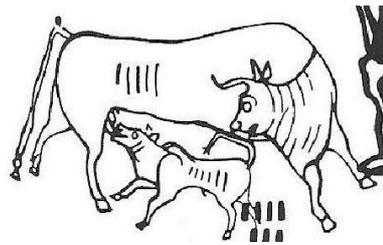


Figure 2. Cow and calf depicted on a sherd from Kuntillet Ajrud.

According to Barnett (1935:207), the motif represents a divinity. An Old Babylonian seal impression shows a cow and calf above a figure of Ishtar, and the symbol has therefore been thought to represent this goddess, although, according to Van Buren (1945:36), it more likely represents Ninhursag. A cow and calf are also associated with Asherah on a sherd from Kuntillet Ajrud [figure 2] (Dever 1984:27), and therefore may represent this goddess in the Levant<sup>2</sup>. A cow and calf are depicted on a wall relief of Sargon's palace at Khorsabad. They are listed amongst the objects plundered by this king from the temple of Haldi at Musasir. Because they belonged to the temple, it is possible that they represented a deity. Ornan (2005:162-3), however, believes them to represent "an apotropaic figure, a mount animal, or an object of worship in its own right." She argues further that the cow-suckling-calf motif symbolises abundance. It is notable then that a cow and calf formed the Egyptian hieroglyph "to be joyful" (Frankfort 1978:166), because these two concepts are clearly connected.

### 3. EGYPT

#### 3.1 Hathor

The most famous and easily recognizable cow-goddess is the Egyptian goddess Hathor, whose

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<sup>2</sup>These goddesses are discussed below.

principle cult centre from the Old Kingdom onwards was at Dendera. One of the most popular deities of the Egyptian pantheon, she was the goddess of woman, love, sexuality, fertility, music, dance and alcohol. As goddess of music, a sistrum (a ritual rattling instrument) [figure 3] was closely associated with her. This instrument was used in musical celebrations and was often decorated with Hathor's head. Hathor wore a *menat*, a necklace especially associated with her which represented pleasure and joy (Remler 2010:76) and which may have been equivalent to the *ankh*, symbolising "life-giving properties" (Wilkinson 1971:69) and fertility.



Figure 3: Relief depicting Hathor playing a sistrum for Amenemhat III.



Figure 4: Twenty-sixth Dynasty fragment of a sistrum decorated with the face of Hathor.

She was depicted as a cow [figure 8], as a woman with cow's ears and a wig [figure 4], as a woman with a headdress with a sun disk between cow's horns [figure 3], or, in rare cases, as a woman with cow's head [figure 5]. Often only the face or head of the goddess, with cows horns and ears, is depicted in relief sculpture. Bleeker (1973:22) notes that "a striking feature of this representation is that here the goddess is seen full-face." Egyptian deities were usually shown in profile, with only Hathor and Bes being depicted frontally. In the rendering of figures, there was a tendency to avoid depicting figures from the front. This was probably for strictly practical reasons. It is difficult to depict a face convincingly from the front in low relief without the features, particularly the nose, appearing flattened. It may therefore be significant when figures are depicted frontally. It is possible that the forward-facing appearance was meant to attract the goddess' attention, and allow for better communication with her.



Figure 5: Statuette of Hathor with the body of a woman and the head of a cow (detail).

In the early Pyramid Texts she is described as a primordial wild cow who made her way through a papyrus thicket at the beginning of creation, carrying the sun-god between her horns (Fassone & Ferraris 2007:154; Hornung 1995:1717). Hathor's representation as a cow identified her as a great mother, symbolising fertility and motherhood (Oakes & Gahlin 2004:284). Wild cows in Egyptian marshes were fiercely protective of their young, and this protective inclination was associated with mothers in general, and with Hathor as a mother goddess in particular. In this way, when Egyptians wanted to represent her attribute of motherly love, Hathor was represented as a cow tending her calf. However, when her sexuality was represented, Hathor was depicted as a beautiful woman (Wenke 2009:238; 267).

As a mother goddess, Hathor was, in some traditions, the mother of Horus<sup>3</sup>. Her name means 'House of Horus'. Because the pharaoh was regarded as the incarnation of Horus, Hathor became the pharaoh's divine mother and was closely associated with kingship (Wilkinson 2005:97). Depictions from the temple and birth-houses at Dendera show Hathor in her human form suckling the baby prince on her lap (Bleeker (1973:52). In the Hathor shrine in Hatshepsut's temple Hatshepsut is identified with the baby Horus, and is shown drinking from the udders of the Hathor cow who says to her, "I have come as your protection. Your mouth is full of my milk, life and stability is in it" [figure 6] (Pinch 1982:140). According to Bleeker (1973:52), the suckling of the child by Hathor is indicative of a royal ritual, whereby a child could only become pharaoh by drinking this divine milk. The role of divine mother was later taken over by Isis, but a relief from a rock-cut chapel at Deir el-Bahri shows Hathor in the form of a cow suckling the pharaoh Amenhotep II [figure 7], illustrating that Hathor was associated

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<sup>3</sup>By the Ptolemaic Period Horus had become envisaged as Hathor's husband.

with the pharaoh until at least the Eighteenth Dynasty.



Figure 6: Relief depicting Hathor in the form of a cow suckling Hatshepsut.



Figure 7: Relief from Deir el-Bahri depicting Hathor in the form of a cow suckling Amenhotep II (visible beneath Hathor).

Hathor's name also reflects her role as a celestial goddess by referencing the 'House of Horus', the abode of the sun god (Clark 1946:241). She was referred to as 'Mistress of Heavens' (Storm 2003:620), and was regarded as a huge cow who straddled the heavens, her four legs marking the cardinal points. When in cow form, her spotted hide was symbolic of her heavenly character, as the spots represented stars, and in some cases were depicted as such [figure 8].

In western Thebes Hathor was the Lady of the West. The 'West' or 'Western Mountain' refers to the place of the setting sun, which Hathor received and nurtured every evening. The Egyptians buried their dead on the west bank of the Nile, and the 'West' therefore, by analogy, referred to the realm of the dead. Hathor acted as a mediating figure between the living and the dead. There are depictions of Hathor as a cow emerging from the sacred mountain of the necropolis at Thebes to welcome the dead [figure 8]. Her milk nourished the gods and the dead and provided them with immortality (Fassone & Ferraris 2007:152-4).



Figure 8: Hathor emerging from the western mountain.

Hathor also had a vengeful and violent aspect which was demonstrated in the *Book of the Cow of Heaven*, which is believed to date from the Amarna Period. This myth describes humanity's rebellion against the aging sun-god, and its punishment by the god's Eye (Hornung 1995:1717). In the myth, this Eye of Ra manifests itself as Hathor, who assumes the form of a fierce lioness. Some scholars, such as Storm (2003:620), believe that Hathor here takes on the form of Sekhmet, a destructive Sun Goddess. Others, such as Oakes and Gahlin (2004:283), believe that the lioness is Sekhmet herself. It seems significant that Hathor was not depicted as a cow in this myth. Her portrayal in this myth does not conform to her usually benevolent character.

### 3.2 Goddesses associated with Hathor

#### 3.2.1 *Minor Goddesses*

Many local goddesses were absorbed into Hathor's identity. According to Gillam (1995:218), this assimilation was employed by the ruling elite to "support the ideology of the kingship and its perpetuation." These goddesses came to represent aspects of Hathor. Many were originally envisioned as cow goddesses. Some of the lesser known of these goddesses include the protective goddess Schentait, who was depicted in the form of a lying cow, Smithis, who helped the dead reach the afterlife, and Shedit<sup>4</sup>.

Hathor also became identified with the sacred cow Sekhat-Hor at Kom el-Hisn. Sekhat-Hor's name means "She who remembers Horus" (Frankfort 1978:44), reflecting her relationship with this god. Originally an ancient forest goddess, she transformed herself into a cow to nurse Horus

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<sup>4</sup>For a full discussion on these goddesses, see Eilenstein (2009:208-211).

and protect him from Seth (Bunson 2002:160). As the protectress of cattle, she saw to the raising of calves and assured an abundant yield of milk and beef (Moens & Wetterstrom 1988:171; 173).

Mehurt's name equates her with the Great Flood, and, according to later myth, she rose from the primeval waters. An ancient Sky Goddess, she was depicted as a cow, and she carried the Sun God between her horns<sup>5</sup>. She wears a *menat*, demonstrating a connection between her and Hathor, and symbolising her role as a goddess of fertility and female sexuality (Wallis Budge 1960:261).

### 3.2.2 *Bat*

Arguably the most famous Cow Goddess with whom Hathor was identified and who she later supplanted was Bat, the local goddess of the seventh nome of Upper Egypt. Depicted as a female head with the ears and horns of a cow, Bat was a celestial goddess, and was important in the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods (Wilkinson 2005:40). She was associated with fertility (Storm 2003:611), and her name is apparently the feminine form of the word *ba*, or 'soul' (Fischer 1962:7). Hathor was identified with Bat as early as the Coffin Texts (Gillam 1995:215). Still, Bat had an independent cult until the Middle Kingdom, and perhaps beyond. This is made clear by the shrine of Senusret I at Karnak, upon which Bat is explicitly named as the goddess of the seventh nome (Fischer 1962:7).



Figure 9: Bovine heads at the top of the reverse of the Narmer Palette.

Two human-faced bovines on either side of the Narmer Palette [figure 9] are generally thought to represent either Bat or Hathor<sup>6</sup>. Both goddess were depicted with a human face and the ears and horns of a cow, but there were subtle differences in the rendering of the horns. Hathor's horns had an elegant outward curve, while Bat's were originally heavy and ribbed with tips which

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<sup>5</sup>According to Bleeker (1973:31) she gave birth to the Sun God. However, she was called Mehurt arit Rā, meaning "Mehurt, the daughter of Rā" (Wallis Budge 1960:261).

<sup>6</sup>See *Chapter 4: The Bull and the King* for a different interpretation of this symbol.

curved inwards. Bat's horns developed into a "stylized pair of long ropelike antennae terminating in graceful spirals [figure 13] (Fischer 1962:12). Because the horns of the bovine faces at the top of the Narmer Palette are quite thick and curve inwards, it is more likely that the goddess who is depicted is Bat. Many scholars, such as Arkell (1955:126) and Wright (1985:241), still believe that it is Hathor who is represented.



Figure 10: Ivory fragment from Abydos.



Figure 11: Fragment of the Hathor bowl.

An ivory carving from the tomb of First Dynasty pharaoh Anedjib at Abydos [figure 10] depicts two bovine heads similar to those on the Narmer Palette. This piece may have been part of the inlay of a casket or a piece of furniture (Petrie 1900:25). The bovine heads are therefore not unique to the iconography of the Narmer Palette.

Related to the bovine heads of the Narmer Palette and the ivory carving are depictions of a human face with cow's ears and horns decorated with stars. The so-called Hathor bowl, found at Hierakonpolis and dating from the First Dynasty contains such a depiction [figure 11] (Burgess & Arkell 1958:6). Again, the horns curve inwards, and five stars are found around the head, one at the end of each horn, one beside each ear, and one above the centre of the head. This brings to mind a predynastic cosmetic palette from Gerzeh which combines celestial and bovine themes. The palette contains a representation of what appears to be a highly stylised bovine head with ears and with horns which curve inwards [figure 12]. As in the depiction on the Hathor bowl, there are five stars; two at the ends of the horns, two at the ears, and one above the centre of the head. The stars in these depictions reveal the celestial aspect of the goddess. Both Hathor and Bat were celestial goddesses, so either could be depicted in these representations.



Figure 12: Gerzeh Palette.



Figure 13: Statuary group depicting Menkaure with Hathor on his right and Bat on his left.

Hathor's name is first attested from the early First Dynasty (Wilkinson 2005:97), and by the end of the Fourth Dynasty Hathor's cult, centred at Dendera, had become one of the most important and influential in Upper Egypt. However, her horns and sun-disk are first attested during the Fourth Dynasty (Fischer 1962:12), and it is therefore possible that depictions of cow goddesses from before this time do not represent Hathor. By the reign of Menkaure in the Fourth Dynasty, the two goddesses were separate entities, as is demonstrated by both of them appearing in statuary group with the pharaoh as a triad [figure 13]. It seems then that these representations, because of their early date and the inward curve of the horns on the figure, depict Bat and not Hathor. Fischer (1962:11) quotes the Sixth Dynasty Pyramid Text of Menrenre in which "Menrenre is Bat, (with) her two faces." The instances in which two bovine heads are depicted, such as on the Narmer Palette and the ivory carving, may be a visual reflection of this. But Friedman (1995:3) describes Bat as "a manifestation of Hathor", and it is also possible that the two goddesses were so closely identified at the time that the clear distinction which we make between them today did not exist then.

### 3.2.3 *Isis*

Isis came in later times to take over the role of divine mother from Hathor, but they always remained separate goddesses. Her headdress was first depicted as the hieroglyph symbol for a throne, but when she assimilated this role, she wore Hathor's cow horns with solar disc (Hornblower 1927:245). The cow which gave birth to the Apis bull was identified with Isis.

This cow was believed to be impregnated by a ray of sunlight, and after giving birth to the Apis bull, she could never have another calf. From the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, she was buried in the Iseum, a set of catacombs located close to the Serapeum.

#### 3.2.4 *Hesat*

Isis was identified with the Cow Goddess Hesat. Some scholars, such as Gadalla (2001:84) believe that Hesat was a form of Hathor. Because Isis took on some characteristics of Hathor, it could be that Hesat was associated with both goddesses. She was a white celestial cow and was said to be “the first of the cows” (Lurker 1987:80). She was a protective goddess of pregnant and nursing mothers. Her milk, called the “beer of Hesat”, nourished mankind (Jordan 2004:124). In some traditions she was the mother of Anubis and Imuit, and gave birth to the king in the form of a golden calf (Hart 2005:69). The cow which gave birth to a Mnevis bull was worshipped as the earthly form of Hesat.

### 3.3 **Goddesses, not associated with Hathor, who were equated with the Cow**

Few goddesses who were not equated with Hathor were depicted as cows. The most important of these are Nut and Neith. A possible third goddess is Meskhent, a goddess who presided over childbirth, who, according to Frankfort (1978:166), had “the bicornate uterus of a heifer” as her symbol.

Nut was the ancient Sky Goddess and consort of the Earth God Geb. Usually portrayed in human form, she was sometimes depicted as a cow arching over the earth as the Sun God in his ship sails across her back [figure 14] (Bleeker 1973:31). In the *Book of the Cow of Heaven* the goddess Nut transforms herself into a cow so that she can carry Ra, the Sun God (Van Dijk 1995:1707). As the celestial cow, her “teats drip fertility” (Albright 1920:264), representing the nourishing rains which fall on the earth.

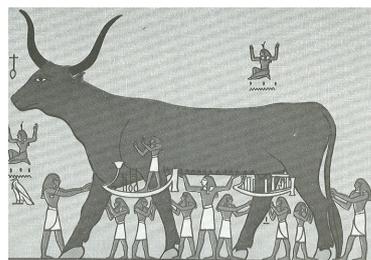


Figure 14: Nut as the celestial cow.

Neith is usually depicted as a woman holding a bow, sceptre and arrows and wearing a crown, but is also shown in the form of a cow named Ihet (Wallis Budge 1960:186-7). Neith was a primeval mother goddess and the fullest account of her part in creation is found on the walls of the temple at Esna (Velten 2007:70). In this tradition, at the beginning of time she is envisaged in the form of Ihet floating on the Nun, the watery abyss. She created 30 primeval gods by invoking their names. These gods in turn helped her in creation. She then gave birth to the Sun God Ra. By this tradition she is therefore the mother of all the gods. Ihet is depicted carrying Ra between her horns.

Hathor is the goddess most famously associated with the cow. She was portrayed as a cow, as a woman with cow's ears and a wig or with a headdress with a sun disk between cow's horns, and sometimes as a human figure with a cow's head. She was portrayed as a cow when her aspects of fertility and motherhood were being represented and as a human when her sexuality was being represented. She was the mother of the god Horus, and, by association, the pharaoh claimed her as his divine mother. Hathor is depicted in both text and iconography as a cow suckling the pharaoh. Isis and Neith were also envisaged as mother goddesses. Neith was identified with the cow Ihet, and Isis with Hesat. There was therefore clearly an association between Mother Goddesses and the cow.

Hathor acted as a mediator between the living and the dead, welcoming the dead to the afterlife. Because death was seen as a continuation of life in Egyptian thought, by helping the deceased reach the afterlife, Hathor can be said to be renewing life, and another aspect of her fertility is demonstrated.

Ancient and lesser known goddesses who were associated with the cow became associated and identified with Hathor. Many of these goddesses represented aspects of Hathor. Smithis helped the deceased reach the afterlife and Sekhat-Hor nursed Horus, both functions which Hathor also fulfilled. The most well known goddess with whom Hathor was associated was Bat. These goddesses were both depicted with human faces and the ears and horns of a cow. It is difficult to determine which of these two goddesses is represented in Predynastic and First Dynasty depictions of bovine heads, but it appears more likely that these are depictions of Bat.

As a celestial goddess, when Hathor was portrayed in the form of a cow, the spots on her hide were in the shapes of stars. Bat, Hesat and Nut were also celestial goddesses who took the form of a cow.

#### 4. THE LEVANT

##### 4.1 Astarte

Byblos was situated in a great timber exporting region, and contained an influential Egyptian district. This settlement contained a temple to Hathor, who was equated with the goddess Astarte<sup>7</sup>. Astarte was, like Hathor, called *Baalat-Gebal*, the ‘Lady of Byblos’ (Aruz *et al* 2008:56). Astarte was the mother of the gods, and, in the *Baal Cycle*, was the consort of El. Astarte borrowed some of the attributes of Hathor, including the headdress of the sun-disc between a pair of cow’s horns<sup>8</sup> (Aruz *et al* 2008:56).

That Astarte was worshipped east of the Jordan is evidenced by the occurrence of her name in towns in the area. The name of the town Ashteroth-karnaim means ‘Ashteroth<sup>9</sup> with horns’ (Osborn 1859:47) or ‘Ashtaroth of the two horns’ (Hastings, Hastings & Hastings 1905:132). It has been argued that the ‘horns’ in this name represent hills and that the settlement was built on two hills, or that it was built to resemble two horns (Wells 1809:292). It is more likely that the word ‘horns’ denotes that the goddess was portrayed with a pair of horns. Because horns were generally associated with divinities<sup>10</sup>, that the horns are mentioned must signify that they were of special importance and that there was a special connection between the goddess and a horned animal. According to Wood (1916:241), the cow was sacred to Astarte, while Barton (1894:34) suggests that the bull was sacred to her at Sidon, where she is thought to have been a Moon Goddess. More pertinent is that, according to Waterman (1915:235), she appeared at Sidon with a cow’s head.

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<sup>7</sup>Astarte was also sometimes worshipped in Egypt as the daughter of Ra (Storm 2003:610), a relationship which Hathor had with Ra in the *Book of the Heavenly Cow*.

<sup>8</sup>According to Wood (1916:241), a bronze statuette of the goddess with two horns was found at Gezer. It is unclear from his report whether these horns were depicted as those of Hathor, or whether they merely represent the horns equated with divinity in general.

<sup>9</sup>Astarte, Ashteroth and Asherah are often identified or associated with each other.

<sup>10</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 6: The Horned Headdress of Divinity*.

A relief of Nectanebo II depicts a female riding a bull, holding reins in one hand, and raising the other above her head [figure 15]. The top of the relief is broken, but the pose suggests that she would have brandished a weapon in the upraised hand. Although certain identification is impossible, Cornelius (2004:43) suggests that the figure represents Astarte.



Figure 15: Relief of Nectanebo depicting a goddess riding a bull.

## 4.2 Anat

Anat was the goddess of love and war, popular from the middle of the second millennium until the Hellenistic era. She was worshipped across the western areas of the ancient Near East<sup>11</sup>. In Ugaritic mythology she was the daughter of El and the sister and consort of Baal<sup>12</sup>.

Anat is associated with the cow in a number of Ugaritic texts commonly known as *The Loves of Baal and Anat*. In one three-column tablet she may actually be depicted as a cow. The text recounts how Anat seeks out Baal in a region well populated with wild bulls and cows. The text ends with Baal rejoicing when Anat tells him that a calf has been born to him. There is a similar episode in the *Baal Cycle*, immediately before Baal fights Mot, where Baal copulates with a heifer which then gives birth to a child (Parker 1995:2406). The usual interpretation of *The Loves of Baal and Anat* is that Anat transforms herself into a heifer, whom Baal, the Bull, mounts (Leick 1998:7). There are, however, problems with this reading, because there are lacunae in the text. According to Kapelrud (1952:69), it is “likely that... she (the cow) was identical with Anat.” Day (1992:184) argues against the reading that Anat is the heifer with which Baal copulates in these texts, stating that nowhere is this explicitly stated. Indeed, there are instances

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<sup>11</sup>Interestingly, Anat, like Astarte, was a Semitic goddess who was sometimes regarded in Egypt as the daughter of Ra.

<sup>12</sup>The terms ‘brother’ and ‘sister’ may be terms of endearment rather than expressing an actual familial relationship.

where the cows are clearly not Anat. Labuschagne (1964:98) suggests that the cow is not a manifestation of Anat, but is representative of her. In either case, it is certain that the heifer was of vital importance in these texts as a symbol of fertility, and as a means of procreation for Baal, and that Anat was at least associated with these animals.

If Anat is represented as a cow in these texts, it is curious that she does not appear to be depicted as one in iconographic sources. According to Aruz *et al* (2008:243), a herd of cattle depicted in a hunt scene on a gold dish from fourteenth century Ugarit<sup>13</sup> may represent the gods, and the cow in this group would therefore depict Anat [figure 16]. This seems unlikely, because while the two bulls could be explained as El and Baal, and the cow as Anat, the calf can not be connected with any god. This casts doubt on the entire hypothesis that the herd represents deities. This gold dish can therefore not be taken as evidence that Anat was depicted as a cow during this or any period.

A bronze plaque from Tel Dan dating to the ninth or eighth century bears a depiction of a goddess standing on a bull [figure 17]. The depiction is quite crude, with a rectangular body with a zigzag pattern, and lines issuing from the goddesses shoulders which represent wings. Lewis suggests this goddess is Ishtar, while Ornan (2006:2002) argues that the goddess was “inspired by both the north-Syrian portrayals of Shaushka and first-millennium portrayals of Mesopotamian Ishtar<sup>14</sup>”. Although found in the Canaanite area, this work does not appear to depict a Canaanite goddess.



Figure 16: Gold dish from Ugarit.



Figure 17: Bronze plaque from Tel Dan.

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<sup>13</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 5: The Royal Bull Hunt*.

<sup>14</sup>Shaushka, who will be rendered in this work as Šaušga, and Inanna/Ishtar are discussed below.

There is little evidence that goddesses were identified with or portrayed as cows or bulls in the Levant. In *The Loves of Anat and Baal*, Anat is clearly associated with the cow, if she is not represented by it. It is curious then that she is not portrayed as such in iconography. The name of the town Ashteroth-karnaim appears to associate Astarte with a bovid. Various scholars associate her with the cow or bull, but there does not appear to be much concrete evidence for this identification. The bronze plaque from Tel Dan does not appear to depict a goddess of the area. The relief of Nectanebo II is therefore the only direct evidence that we have that a Levantine goddess, perhaps Astarte, was iconographically associated with the bull.

## 5. MESOPOTAMIA

There appear to have been a number of goddesses associated with cows in the earlier periods of Mesopotamian history. This association, however, is usually found in textual references, and, like in the Levant, there is very little iconographic evidence of goddesses being depicted as cows.

### 5.1 Ninsun

The goddess Ninsun's name means 'Lady of the Wild Cows'. According to Jacobsen (1989:74), she was originally envisaged in the form of a cow, and her name would have been understood as 'Lady Wild Cow'. She was the mother of Dumizi and Gilgamesh. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh* she is consistently described as 'Wild-Cow Ninsun'. The epic also makes it clear that she is a goddess of high intelligence, for when Gilgamesh asks his mother's advice, it is revealed that "Wild-Cow Ninsun was clever and wise, well versed in everything" (George 2003:11). Ninsun was Gudea's personal goddess, and he also appears to have claimed her as his mother. In a passage from Gudea's Cylinder B (xxiii.19-21), she is described as "a good cow in woman-fashion" (Jacobsen 1976:159). This suggests that, although she may have been depicted as a cow in the early periods of Mesopotamian history, by the end of the third millennium she was depicted in human form.

### 5.2 Inanna/Ishtar

The most well-known Mesopotamian goddess is the Sumerian goddess Inanna. Her Akkadian name, Ishtar, is related to the name of the Syrian goddess Astarte, with whom she was associated. Inanna's name is a contraction of Nin-anna, meaning "Lady of Heaven". She was initially a fertility goddess, and was the mistress of store-houses and stables (Caubet & Pouyssegur

1998:188).

A lapis lazuli cylinder seal from the Late Uruk Period, now in the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin, bears the depiction of a priest-king in a boat. The priest-king faces a bull which has a stepped structure on its back [figure 18]. The function and purpose of the structure is uncertain, but it may have been a dais for cult statues, an altar, or an offering table (Collon 2005:172). The interpretation that it has some cultic significance is supported by the fact that the structure is surmounted by two ring-posts with streamers, which were associated with Inanna<sup>15</sup>. The bull therefore associated with Inanna through this cultic structure.



Figure 18: Uruk Period cylinder seal depicting the priest-king in a boat.

Another Uruk Period cylinder seal, now housed in the Louvre, depicts a reed hut which is surmounted by one ring-post [figure 19]. This ring-post does not have the streamer definitively associating it with Inanna, but it also does not conform with the iconography of the ‘Bügelschaft’ which is more commonly associated with a god<sup>16</sup>. It appears to be a variation of the ring-post, and the building can therefore be associated with Inanna, and most likely served to house her sacred herd.

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<sup>15</sup>A ring-headed post, usually with streamers, is the earliest form of the written sign for the name of Inanna, and is used as her symbol. This symbol most probably represents a bundle of reeds bound together with the upper ends bent over to make a loop. It is found most commonly in the art of the Uruk Period, and was found, although rarely, until the Early Dynastic Period (Black & Green 1992:154). All representations of the ring-post with streamers for which the provenance is known come from the Eanna precinct at Uruk (Van Buren 1945:44).

<sup>16</sup>The ‘Bügelschaft’ can also be described as a ring-staff. It differs from the ring-post because it is depicted as a pole with a ring at the side. It may be related to the post with two or three rings on either side. In later representations it was sometimes held as an object. In these cases, it was always held by a god, never by a goddess (Black & Green 1992:155). According to Van Buren (1945:47) the ‘Bügelschaft’ was originally the symbol of the god Anu.



Figure 19: Uruk Period cylinder seal depicting the sacred herd.

Although Ishtar is associated with the cow in iconography, she is not depicted as one. She is represented as a cow in texts. In a poem dedicated to Idin-Dagan of Isin, Ishtar is described as “the furious wild cow of heaven” (Langdon 1926:20). In another text she proclaims: “I am father Enlil’s splendid wild cow, his splendid wild cow leading the way!” (Jacobsen 1976:138). A text from the time of Ashurbanipal is written as a dialogue between the king and the god Nabu and focusses on Ishtar’s role in Ashurbanipal’s life. Nabu reminds the king: “You were a child, Assurbanipal, when I left you with the Queen of Nineveh; you were a baby, Assurbanipal, when you sat in the lap of the Queen of Nineveh. Her four teats are placed in your mouth... two you suck, and with two you spray milk on your face” (Porter 2004:42). In the text the goddess has four teats because she is envisaged in her bovine form.

### 5.3 **Ninhursag**

The remains of the decorations of the Early Dynastic Temple of Ninhursag from Ubaid reflect the Mother Goddess’s aspect of fertility, her power of birth, animals and milk. A limestone frieze contains a scene of cattle moving to the right, and another representing cows being milked, and of the production of butter and other milk products. Newborn calves are also depicted emerging from a reed hut or bier, the doorway of which is flanked by two ‘Bügelstaff’ [figure 20]. The cattle depicted in these scenes would have been the sacred herd of the temple, and this depiction is therefore related to the cylinder seal discussed above. This sacred herd is also represented by copper alloy bulls which decorated the temple<sup>17</sup> [figure 21]. These may represent the male principle (Aruz & Walfels 2003:28;87), and at least some of these bulls are associated with the Moon God by the crescent which decorates their foreheads. It is still notable that they are found in association with Ninhursag.

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<sup>17</sup>These bulls and some separate heads are discussed in *Chapter 2: Decorative Bulls’ Heads*, and *Chapter 7: The Bull and the Gods*.



Figure 20: Frieze from the Temple of Ninhursag at Ubaid.

Ninhursag herself is represented as a cow in a well-preserved tablet known as *The Mother-goddess in Search of Her Lost Son*. The goddess is portrayed metaphorically as a cow who is searching for her lost child (Kramer 1980:299). At the end of the text she is advised: “Cow, do not low for the calf” (Jacobsen 1976:64), because her son is in the netherworld and will not be returned to her.



Figure 21: Copper bull from the Temple of Ninhursag at Ubaid.

#### 5.4 Foundation Pegs

Three copper foundation pegs dating to the Ur III Period from Telloh are surmounted by bulls<sup>18</sup>. Two of these foundation pegs record Gudea’s rebuilding of the Eanna Temple dedicated to Inanna in Uruk [figure 22]. The third foundation peg was dedicated by Shulgi, the second ruler of the Third Dynasty of Ur, to the goddess Nanshe. A fourth, unique, foundation peg from the reign of Gudea and now in the British Museum is a cast copper figure of a bull surrounded by reeds or palm fronds [figure 23]. There is a cuneiform inscription on the peg which recounts the rebuilding of the temple of Nanshe by Gudea. Nanshe has a lyre named “Cow abundance” (Maxwell-Hyslop 1992:81), but, other than the lyre and these foundation pegs, there is no evidence that she was depicted in bovine form in either text or iconography, or that she was

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<sup>18</sup>Foundation pegs in general, as well as the foundation pegs mentioned in this chapter, are also discussed in *Chapter 11: The Bull and Composite Bull Figures as Protective Bings*.

associated with a cow or bull.

All known examples of foundation pegs depicting bulls are therefore associated with goddesses. It appears then that there was an established relationship between the bull and at least certain goddesses. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the bulls which decorated the Temple of Ninhursag at Ubad may therefore be associated with both the Moon God and with Ninhursag.



Figure 22: Foundation peg in the shape of a bull.



Figure 23: Foundation peg with a bull surrounded by vegetation.

The goddesses themselves were not represented as cows in iconography, although Ninhursag was in *The Mother-goddess in Search of Her Lost Son*. Inanna is compared to a cow in texts, and as Ishtar is represented as suckling Ashurbanipal. It is possible that Ninsun was envisaged in the form of a cow, but she was not portrayed as one as early as the end of the third millennium. The foundation pegs surmounted by bulls represent the best iconographic evidence that bulls were associated with goddesses in Mesopotamia. These may represent the sacred herd of the temple. This association between Inanna and cattle was also shown in depictions on cylinder seals.

## 6. ANATOLIA

### 6.1 Šaušga

A nude female deity was a common figure in Anatolian art during the second millennium. This goddess is also shown on Syrian cylinder seal impressions from the Assyrian Colony Period. She appears to have been a form of Ishtar, who in her human form was often shown with wings and holding a weapon. As the goddess of love and sexuality, she was the natural source of fertility (Caubet & Pouyssegur 1998:188). In the Hittite Empire, this goddess was called Šaušga, a

Hurrian name. She is depicted frontally, and is usually nude. She sometimes has wings, and in some examples she stands over a bull (Alexander 1991:167-8).

## 6.2 Kubaba

A stele from Arslantepe<sup>19</sup> now housed in the Museum of Ankara depicts the goddess Kubaba, the tutelary goddess of Carchemish, seated on a backless chair which is mounted on the back of a bull. Facing her is the god Tarhunta who stands on a lion. This stele is unusual because it is usually the Storm God who is associated with the bull, while goddesses are more commonly associated with lions. It is also unusual because nowhere else is Kubaba associated with the bull.



Figure 24: Stele from Arslantepe depicting Kubaba on a bull.

No goddesses are depicted as cows or with bovine characteristics or attributes in Anatolia. The bull is depicted as the mount for both Šaušga and Kubaba. The Arslantepe relief, in which Kubaba sits on a chair which is mounted on the back of a bull, is unique because it is the only instance in which she is associated with the bull. Šaušga, on the other hand, is depicted standing on a bull on several cylinder seals.

## 7. CONCLUSION

While it was common for gods to be associated with bulls, there are only a few notable examples of goddesses associated with cows. This connection is more commonly seen in text than in iconography. It was predominantly the goddesses of the early periods which were identified with

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<sup>19</sup>This stele is also discussed in *Chapter 6: The Horned Headdress of Divinity*.

cows. Goddesses depicted as cows were not necessarily Cow Goddesses, their main function was usually that of motherhood or fertility, and this was depicted in a variety of ways. Although there were many goddesses depicted as cows in ancient Egypt, nearly all of these were assimilated with Hathor and represented aspects of this great goddess.

Hathor is the most well known goddess to be associated with or identified as a cow. She was the mother of Horus, and, by association, the pharaoh claimed her as his mother. She is depicted in human and cow form suckling the pharaoh in both texts and iconography. Ishtar is similarly represented in texts as suckling the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal. It is these goddesses' role of divine mother which is being associated with the cow. Isis was also an Egyptian goddess of motherhood, and was in later periods identified with Hathor and was depicted with Hathor's horns and solar disc. Astarte was similarly the great Mother Goddess of the Canaanite pantheon and Ninursag was a Mesopotamian Mother Goddess. Both of these goddesses were also associated with cattle, although not as explicitly as Hathor was. Astarte's association with a bovid is revealed in the name of Ashteroth-karnaim, and the cow or bull appears to have been sacred to her. Ninursag is represented as a cow in *The Mother-goddess in Search of Her Lost Son*. Her temple at Ubaid was replete with images of cattle. Ninsun was also clearly seen as an important Mother Goddess, because Dumuzi, Gilgamesh and Gudea all claimed her as their mother.

Celestial goddess were also associated with the cow. Predynastic and First Dynasty depictions of Bat or, less likely, Hathor present the face of the goddess which is decorated with stars. When she was depicted as a cow, Hathor's spotted hide was symbolic of the night sky, and the spots were sometimes even depicted as stars. While Hathor, Bat are classified as celestial goddesses, Nut was a Sky Goddess in the sense that she represented the sky. She was depicted as a cow, and the milk which she produced represented the fertilising rains. Although a Sky Goddess, she also had a aspect of fertility.

Outside Egypt there are few goddesses which are associated with the cow or bull. Šaušga and Kubaba are the only goddesses which are depicted with the bull as their mount. They are the only Anatolian goddesses which appear to have any association with cattle. The relief of Nectanebo depicts a goddess, perhaps identifiable as Astarte, riding a bull.

In Mesopotamia Inanna and Ninhursag are associated with the temple herd. Ring-posts, symbolic of Inanna, surmount buildings or flank their doorways, usually marking these as temples. On cylinder seals in which a herd of cattle approach the structure from either side, these buildings would have housed the temple herd. This fits in with Inanna's role as mistress of the stables. Ninhursag's temple at Ubaid was full of decorations which depicted cattle. Some of these may have been associated with a male divinity, but it is still notable that they decorated Ninhursag's temple because Ninhursag was represented as a cow in at least one text, *The Mother-goddess in Search of Her Lost Son*.

Anat is associated, if not identified, with a cow in *The Loves of Baal and Anat*, but this association is not evident in iconography. Similarly, Ninsun's name identifies her as a Cattle Goddess, but nowhere is she depicted as one. Because these two goddesses are particularly associated with cows in texts, it is curious that they are not also depicted as cows in iconography.

## **SECTION D: THE BULL AND RELIGIOUS PRACTICES**

### **CHAPTER 9: BULL SACRIFICE**

*Bulls were sacrificed across the ancient Near East. Depictions of sacrifice are rare in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant, but are abundant in Egypt. Some sacrificial altars are also associated with bull imagery. These depictions and altars will be examined to identify differences and similarities in the portrayal of bull sacrifice in the different areas of the ancient Near East.*

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The bull formed the focus of several rituals in ancient Near Eastern society and religion. The most obvious and well known of these is its use as an offering for sacrifice. Although texts detailing the practice of sacrifice are abundant in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant, depictions of the practice are rare in these areas. The opposite is true for Egypt, where depictions are plentiful while texts recounting sacrifice are rare.

A sacrifice, according to Black & Green (1992:30), is “a religious rite by which an object, animal or person is offered to a divinity in an attempt to establish, maintain or restore a satisfactory relationship of the individual, group of individuals or the community to that god.” More specifically, a sacrifice can be distinguished from an offering by the fact that a sacrifice involves “the ritual killing or processing of the object being offered” (Yakar 1991:310). In the cultures of the ancient Near East, sacrifice refers especially to the killing and offering of an animal (Bienkowski & Millard 2000:247). Our understanding of the term is strongly influenced by biblical ideology, in which a sacrifice represents something lost or destroyed in order to pay homage to God or as atonement for sin. Sacrifices, however, were more commonly conceived as gifts from which a deity would derive pleasure or use (Bottéro 2001:125). Although the ideologies behind these two general concepts of offering were different, the function remained the same. Sacrifices were meant for the enjoyment and nourishment of the gods.

The sacrifice itself would most commonly have occurred at an altar. According to Black &

Green (1992:29) an altar is “an upright standing object at or upon which sacrifice and offering are made, in fact or symbolically.” The altar was sometimes placed next to or upon a statue of the deity’s animal, and sometimes this statue even functioned as an altar. These altars and the depictions of and relating to bull sacrifice will be examined to identify differences and similarities in these portrayals in the different areas of the ancient Near East.

## 2. MESOPOTAMIA

### 2.1 The Act of Sacrifice

The widespread Mesopotamian belief was that man was created as the servant of the gods, and it was therefore man’s duty to provide the gods with whatever they needed or desired. Animal sacrifice was in essence a meal served to a deity (McCarthy 1969:166).

The foods and drinks offered to the gods were the same as those consumed by man, as well as luxury items. The offerings were prepared in the temple kitchens and were offered to the statue of the divinity. The offerings were most likely then consumed by the temple personnel (Bottéro 2001:130). The primary animal of sacrifice was the sheep. Cattle and goats were also sacrificed, as well as, in prehistoric times at least, fish (Black & Green 1992:30).

There were regular sacrifices, which were offered to deities every day of the year at meal times. Special offerings were made at festivals. These could be held every month or once a year (Bienkowski & Millard 2000:247). An example of bull sacrifice on a special occasion is from the New Year’s celebration in Babylon, which was centred on Marduk and his Esagil temple. On the fifth day of Nisan, the new year, a hole was to be dug in the Exalted Courtyard of Esagil and filled with a reed bundle which was set alight. A white bull was then sacrificed in front of this hole (Bottéro 2001:162).

Depictions of sacrifices are extremely rare in Mesopotamian art. The altar in the so-called Painted Temple at Uqair<sup>20</sup> [figure 1], dating from the Uruk Period, contained a side platform, which stood in the corner of the room. Leopards were painted on the sides of the altar platform.

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<sup>20</sup>This temple dates to the Uruk Period, but the altar apparently dates to a later period, because the painted ornament continued to the floor level behind it. Also, altars of this kind were not found in Uruk Period buildings at Uruk (Goff 1963:75).

The corner walls above the side platform were decorated with animals which Lloyd, Safar and Frankfort (1943:142), based on the “ubiquitous representation” of the “temple herd” on contemporary cylinder seals and friezes, have reconstructed as bulls<sup>21</sup>. It is interesting that bulls were associated with a place of sacrifice already at this early period.

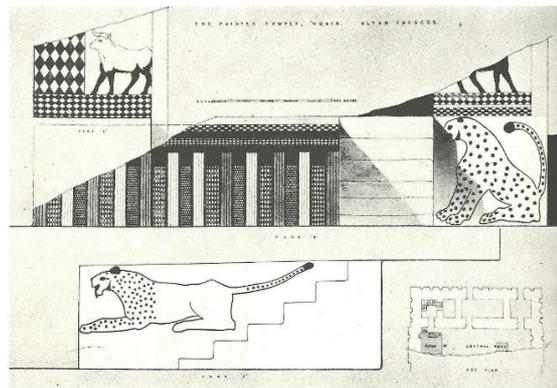


Figure 1: The altar from the Painted Temple at Uqair.

The earliest known depiction of an actual sacrifice is found on Eannatum’s Stele of the Vultures<sup>22</sup>. In the third register of the historical side of the stele, Eannatum pours a libation above a bull which is tied to the ground on its back [figure 2]. A pile of bodies is depicted next to this sacrifice scene, showing that this scene takes place after the conflict. The sacrifice therefore could not have represented a request for help from the gods, but would rather have represented an offering of thanks for Lagash’s victory.

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<sup>21</sup> Based on the appearance of the legs of these animals, there seems little doubt that they did represent bulls. The uncertainty of the reconstruction is therefore in the appearance of the upper part of the animal, and not the interpretation of it representing a bull.

<sup>22</sup>The Stele of the Vultures commemorates Eannatum’s victory over Lagash’s neighbouring city-state, Umma. It is noteworthy not only because it contains the first representation of a bull sacrifice, but because it is the only known example of historical relief from the Early Dynastic Period, and the first work of art to record an actual historic event. The stele’s two sides can be designated as the ‘historical’ and ‘mythological’ side due to their content. The historical side depicts the earthly battle between Lagash and Umma, while the mythological side reveals the role of the gods in the battle.



Figure 2: Sacrifice scene from the Stele of the Vultures.

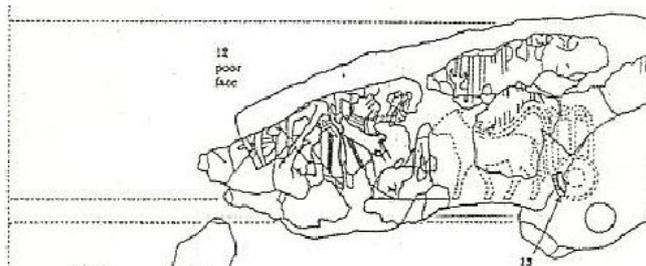


Figure 3: Sacrifice scene from the Ur-Nammu Stele.

The second register of the poor<sup>23</sup> face of the Ur-Nammu Stele also contains a clear scene of bull sacrifice [figure 3]. One of the men involved is removing the liver of the animal (Ascalone 2005:38). The interpretation of this being a sacrifice scene is supported by the fact that a chariot in front of a row of standards is shown on the same register (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:446). The animal would be being sacrificed in order to grant good fortune to the army, or for its intestines to be examined for signs of the future.



Figure 4: Early Dynastic sculptural group depicting a man presenting a bull for sacrifice.

The Stele of the Vultures and the Ur-Nammu Stele are the only known depictions of a bull in the process of being sacrificed. Other stages of the sacrifice, such as the presenting of the bull to the gods, are also depicted. An Early Dynastic Period miniature sculptural group represented a bull and a man in the typical posture of votive statues, with his hands clasped together in front of him

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<sup>23</sup>The two faces were previously designated as the 'obverse' and 'reverse', but are now designated 'poor' and 'good', reflecting the condition of their surface (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:444).

in a display of reverence [figure 4]. The bull lies next to the man with its legs folded underneath it. This group represents a man offering a bull for sacrifice.



Figure 5: Mural from Mari



Figure 6: Mural from Mari.

Similarly, fragments of a mural from Courtyard 106 of the Palace at Mari, now in the National Museum of Aleppo and in the Louvre, depict an offering scene in which bulls are led for sacrifice [figures 5 and 6]. These murals probably commemorate a special offering and date to the reign of Shamshi-Adad or Zimri-Lim (Roaf 2004:119). The king is at the head of the procession and is double the size of the other sacrificers. Behind the king are two registers of priests, sacrificers, diviners, and dignitaries (Margueron 1995:893). The bulls are led forward by a rope fastened to a nose ring. Their horns have tips made of silver or gold, and a crescent pendant adorns each bull's forehead<sup>24</sup> (Aruz *et al* 2008:33; Frankfort 1996:126).



Figure 7: Relief from Ashurnasirpal II's palace.

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<sup>24</sup>This crescent recalls the crescents and triangles found on the bulls' heads from the Temple of Ninhursag, as well as certain protomes from musical instruments, discussed in further detail in *Chapter 2: Decorative Bulls' Heads*.

By the time of the Neo-Assyrian kings, royal hunts seem to have been a form of animal sacrifice (Black & Green 1992:33). Ashurnasipal II is shown in one of the reliefs from his palace standing next to a bull which he has killed, pouring a triumphant libation of wine [figure 7] (Curtis & Reade 1995:55). Also from the Neo-Assyrian Period, the decorated relief bands of the Balawat Gates contain a number of scenes of sacrifice. One such scene shows Shalmaneser III's visit to the source of the Tigris in 852 [figure 8] (Reade 1998:21). The text reads, "I entered the sources of the river; I offered sacrifices to the gods; my royal image I set up" (Frankfort 1996:166). The relief shows a ram and a bull being brought for sacrifice while workmen cut commemorative panels (Frankfort 1996:167). Similar scenes show cattle and sheep being led to sacrifice in the mountains northwest of Assyria (Roaf 2004:167), and on the arrival of the Assyrians at Lake Urmia (Curtis & Reade 1995:98). Divination priests accompany the animals in some of these scenes. They would have studied the entrails of the sacrificial animals for signs of the future and assisted the king in making important decisions.



Figure 8: Depiction of bull sacrifice.



Figure 9: Votive plaque of Lumma.

Less obviously associated with sacrifice are scenes depicting banquets and the preparations for the feasts. An inscription on a limestone plaque excavated from the Temple of Inanna in Nippur from the Early Dynastic III Period tells us that the plaque was dedicated to Ninsar by Lumma [figure 9] (Ascalone 2005:203). It is divided into three registers, the upper register containing a banquet scene. The bottom register is not extant, but most likely would have contained a scene with a cart being pulled by mules. The middle register has two scenes separated by the central square hole. On the left a man leads a bull towards the left, while on the right a different man leads another bull to the right (Hansen 1963:155). Plaques such as this one contained fairly formulaic depictions. The middle registers usually depicted servants carrying jars or leading

animals to be sacrificed (Ascalone 2005:203). A similar theme, found on the second register of the banquet side of the Standard of Ur, shows men leading bulls, while others carry fish (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:100).

## **2.2 Mythological Bull Slaughter**

### *2.2.1 Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven*

Depictions of certain mythological scenes may also be related to bull sacrifice. Tablet VI of the Epic of Gilgamesh recounts Gilgamesh and Enkidu's battle against the Bull of Heaven, an episode which evokes themes of sacrifice. After Gilgamesh has returned to Uruk after defeating Humbaba, Ishtar becomes infatuated with him and proposes marriage. Gilgamesh rejects her, insulting her regarding how she has treated her past lovers. Angry and humiliated, Ishtar demands that her father, Anu, gives her the Bull of Heaven so that she can use it to exact revenge upon Gilgamesh. The Bull of Heaven devastates the land around Uruk and kills hundreds of men. After a battle, Gilgamesh and Enkidu are able to defeat and kill it. They dedicate the Bull of Heaven's heart to the Sun God Shamash. Gilgamesh goes on to dedicate the animal's horns to his deified father Lugalbanda.

The story is also told in the Sumerian poem entitled *Bilgames and the Bull of Heaven: 'Hero in Battle'*, although with some variation. In this earlier version, the king, here called Bilgames, rejects Inanna on the advice of his mother, the goddess Ninsun, who warns him that if he were to succumb to her advances he would be unable to fulfill his secular functions. After the Bull of Heaven is defeated, it is Bilgames who dedicates the Bull of Heaven's horns to Inanna in her temple Eanna and he distributes the meat of the Bull of Heaven amongst the poor.

In the *Hero in Battle*, Enkidu is described as seizing the Bull of Heaven from behind while Bilgames strikes it with his axe. In the Epic of Gilgamesh Enkidu is described as grabbing the Bull of Heaven from behind by its tail and placing his foot on it to keep it down. While Enkidu does this, Gilgamesh thrusts his knife into the Bull of Heaven's neck. Rice (1998:100) argues that this is different to the usual method of sacrificing a bull, where the jugular vein is slashed, allowing the maximum flow of blood. He argues that this can therefore not represent a sacrifice of any sort. His argument, however, focusses on blood sacrifices, which were peculiar to the

religion of the ancient Israelites, and are not associated with Mesopotamian ritual.



Figure 10: Terracotta plaque showing the slaying of the Bull of Heaven.

Representations in art of the slaying of the Bull of Heaven are rare. A terracotta plaque from the early second millennium now in the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin shows Gilgamesh about to hit the Bull with a club while Enkidu stands behind the bull, holding its tail [figure 10]. The struggle appears on cylinder seals only of the Neo-Babylonian Period (Collon 2005:181). The Bull of Heaven is depicted with wings and a human face on these seals. A chalcedony cylinder seal from the sixth century shows Gilgamesh and Enkidu killing the Bull of Heaven, while Ishtar tries in vain to stop them [figure 11] (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:483). The seal of Qerub-dini-ili, mayor of Raggatu, has a similar scene, but the goddess is absent [figure 12] (Collon 2005:180-1). In all three scenes Gilgamesh holds the Bull of Heaven's horn while Enkidu holds it by the tail on the scene on the plaque and the chalcedony seal, and by its wing on the second seal.



Figure 11: Chalcedony cylinder seal impression.

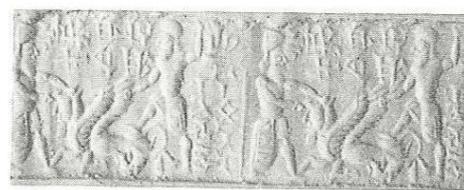


Figure 12: Seal of Qerub-dini-ili.

### 2.2.2 *Mithra and the Bull*

The bull is associated with sacrifice in Mithraism. Mithra is the most well-known god of the Iranian pantheon, due in part to his association with the Roman cult of Mithras. While the Roman Mithras is consistently depicted slaying a bull, the original Persian Mithra was a friend

and protector of cattle. In India his proper sacrifice was milk, butter and grain (McCarthy 1969:174). The Achaemenid Persian Empire was considerably tolerant of the various religions of its peoples, but there were certain basic principals which had to be observed. The early Achaemenids appear to have been followers of Zoroastrianism, and animal sacrifice went against their beliefs. Only grain or flour, wine or beer, or fruits were allowed to be offered to the gods, never animals. The bull-slaying Mithras would therefore not have been worthy of worship (Koch 1995:1969), and can therefore not be considered a Persian and ancient Near Eastern example of bull sacrifice.

The altar from the Painted Temple at Uqair contains a depiction of a bull found in association with a place of sacrifice, and it is reasonable to suggest that bulls were sacrificed at this altar. Depictions of actual slaughter of the bull for sacrifice are rare in Mesopotamian art. The Stele of Vultures and the Ur-Nammu Stele, both dating to the second half of the third millennium, are the only known examples. The exceptions are the depictions of Gilgamesh and Enkidu slaying the Bull of Heaven, which are clearly related to sacrifice. More representations exist of bulls being led or presented for sacrifice. These include the Early Dynastic sculptural group and the wall painting from Mari. Banquet scenes, popular in Mesopotamian art, may represent a variation on this theme. Bulls are depicted being led for slaughter on the Balawat Gates, and are shown with libations being poured on them on Assyrian palace reliefs. Assyrian depictions therefore show various stages of bull sacrifice, although the actual slaughter is not represented.

### 3. ANATOLIA

Perhaps the earliest evidence for bull sacrifice comes from Anatolia. The Skull Building at Çayönü Tepesi<sup>25</sup> contained cattle bones, which, according to Akkermans and Schwartz (2003:75) point to the cattle having been slaughtered in mortuary or funerary rites. Most evidence for the practice, however, comes from Hittite sources.

The Hittite concept of sacrifice was that of offering to the gods the food and drink which they required for nourishment (McCarthy 1969:167). The Hittite verb *šipant-* denotes a religious

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<sup>25</sup>Discussed in detail in *Chapter 1: Bucrania*.

ceremony in which beverages and animal sacrifices were presented to the gods. Bulls are included among the sacrificial animals, while the blood of a bull is an example of a special liquid for sacrifice (Goetze 1971:85-6; 77). A limestone orthostat from the Lion Gate at Arslantepe shows the king pouring a libation to the Storm God. Behind the king a servant holds a bull for sacrifice [figure 13]. A rare glimpse of the gods enjoying the nourishment acquired through sacrifice is given on seals upon which a goddess is shown sitting before a table or altar which is piled with food [figure 14] (Ward 1899:33).



Figure 13: Arslantepe relief.



Figure 14: Seal depicting a goddess in front of an altar.

A banquet scene, similar to those of Mesopotamia, is depicted in a relief from Karatepe which is divided into two registers [figure 15]. The top register shows the king feasting at a table. The lower register shows two men grappling with a bull, another holding a pouring vessel, and a fourth man who carries what appears to be a calf or a sheep. Frankfort (1996:309) understands the lower register to depict “additional provisions, including meat of the hoof”. It is also possible that these animals are for sacrifice. If this interpretation is correct, the vessel would contain liquid for libation.



Figure 15: Karatepe relief.



Figure 16: Savcılı altar.

A unique altar was found on a hill near the village of Savcılı in Turkey and is now in the museum of the Japanese Institute of Anatolian Archaeology in central Turkey [figure 16]. This altar is shaped like a bull with two heads, and may represent the Storm God's sacred pair of bulls, Sherri and Hurri. The statue is shaped like a tub and has two drainage holes, one through the mouth of each bull.

No known Anatolian depictions of the slaughter of the bull exist, but those detailing the events around the slaughter do. The relief from Arslantepe depicts a bull being led for sacrifice. The banquet scenes may similarly represent an animal being readied for sacrifice. Seals depict a goddess shown before a table or altar, revealing that the purpose of sacrifice was the nourishment of the gods. The altar from Savcılı is the only known example of an altar in the shape of a bull.

#### 4. THE LEVANT

##### 4.1 The Act of Sacrifice

In the Levant the sacrifice of bulls was reserved for the highest gods, particularly for Baal and El (Aruz *et al* 2008:243). While animal sacrifice was practised amongst the Israelites, there are differences when compared to the rest of the Ancient Near East. A question in the Biblical Psalm 50:13 "Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" is directed at people practising Canaanite rituals. It is implied that the one asking the question does not do these things (McCarthy 1969:171), which throws into relief the different rituals practised by the various peoples in the Levant.

As in Mesopotamia, the Israelites believed Man was created to serve God, as is apparent in the story of Adam's creation. As God's servant, Man was required to provide their God what He desired or required. Bullocks, young castrated bulls, were used from early times as burnt offerings. The whole animal was burned on the altar to provide God with nourishment<sup>26</sup> (Miller & Miller 1973:82; 824). According to Israelite practice, blood was the "universal purifier and consecrator" (McCarthy 1969:167). As such, animal sacrifices, particularly blood sacrifices,

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<sup>26</sup>Sacrifice later became a purely symbolic ceremony.

functioned not only to provide God with nourishment, but also as atonement for Man's sins<sup>27</sup> (Miller & Miller 1973:19-20).

While the example of Moses demonstrates that the sacrificing of bulls was an essential act, later in the history of the Israelites it became taboo. According to Isaiah 66:3, "But to sacrifice an ox or to kill a man, slaughter a sheep or break a dog's neck, offer grain or offer pig's blood, burn incense as a token and worship an idol - all these things are the chosen practices of men who revel in their own loathsome rites."

A very interesting and unusual case of bull sacrifice comes from the story of Gideon. In Judges 6:25-26 on God's instruction Gideon destroys an altar to Baal and the symbol of the goddess Asherah which was beside it. He then offers the bull image of Baal on the altar of Yahweh using the Asherah pole as firewood (Waterman 1915:238). This is a potent image of one god being sacrificed to another.

#### 4.2 Horned Altars

A series of Syro-Hittite and Syro-Babylonian cylinder seals from around 1500-1000 show what is called the bull-altar. This is a bull with stiff legs and a very artificial body. A conical object, perhaps representing a flame, rises from the rear part of the body. Figures in attitudes of worship are usually found associated with the bull-altar (Morgan 2009:111). Perhaps related to these are seals depicting a bull with a conical "altar" on its back (Canby 1989:113).



Figure 17: Horned altar from Beersheba.

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<sup>27</sup>An example of this kind of sacrifice is found in Leviticus 8:14-15, "He (Moses) then brought up the ox for the sin-offering; Aaron and his sons laid their hands on its head, and he slaughtered it. Moses took some of the blood and put it with his finger on the horns round the altar. Thus he purified the altar, he consecrated it by making expiation for it."

These bull-altars may be related to the horned altars which were attached to some Iron Age altars in the Canaanite area [figure 17]. These altars also suggest traces of bull worship. It is possible that the horns are descendent from horns of actual sacrificial animals which were used to decorate altars (Miller & Miller 1973:14;82). According to Golden (2004:189), these horned altars were used for animal sacrifice and for the burning of incense. Additionally, the horn, like the bull, was a symbol of strength, and therefore of security, and the horned altars were thought to provide protection. This is demonstrated in 1 Kings 1:50, “And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and rose, and went, and caught hold of the horns of the altar.”

Horned limestone altars have been excavated at Meggido, Dan and Beersheba, while one made of mud and fieldstones has been excavated at Arad (Scheffler 2000:98). The horned altar from Megiddo dates to around 1050-1000BCE. The site also produced a number of unique horned incense altars (Miller & Miller 1973:14-5). Beersheba’s horned altar had to be reconstructed from several large stones built into the glacis and the walls of a storehouse dating to the eighth century. Some of the stones were blackened, suggesting that they were the top stone upon which the sacrifices were burnt. The stones were dressed, contrary to the instruction in Exodus 20:25 that “If you make an altar of stone for me, do not build it out of cut stones, because when you use a chisel on stones, you make them unfit for my use.” This suggests that the Beersheba cult was not the one represented in the Bible (Scheffler 2000:98).

There are no known depictions of bull sacrifice from the Levant, although Biblical sources tell us that they did occur. Bull-altars, found on Syro-Hittite and Syro-Babylonian cylinder seals, demonstrate that the bull was found in association with altars, and therefore with sacrifice. The horned altars found at Megiddo, Dan and Beersheba may be related to these bull-altars, and similarly suggest that the bull was involved in sacrifice.

## 5. EGYPT

In the Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods, there is a “complete absence of textual information or elaborate depictions of religious activity” (Wilkinson 1999:269) and although

evidence suggests that cattle were sacrificed<sup>28</sup>, the details of this remain unknown (Wenke 2009:237).

From the Dynastic Period, iconographic and archaeological evidence far outweigh textual references regarding sacrifice. While reference is made to the sacrifice of bulls in texts<sup>29</sup>, details are scarce. The most detailed information about bull sacrifice comes from Book 2:38-41 of Herodotus' *Histories*. In II:38, he explains that the body of a bull was fully inspected to ascertain if the animal could be considered clean and fit for sacrifice. Book II:39 describes the method of sacrifice, in which a bull is led to an altar and a libation of wine was poured on this altar while a god was invoked. The animal was then killed, and its head cut from its body. The method and extent of disembowelment and burning was apparently different according to the god to which the animal was being sacrificed. The validity of Herodotus' claims is questionable. He reports that female cattle were not sacrificed and that the Egyptians would never eat the head of any animal. Contrary to his reports, female cattle were certainly sacrificed. A heifer was buried in a small grave in the northeast corner of the Great Court of the Eleventh Dynasty Temple at Thebes. The animal's legs were tied together, and the earth at its neck had become solidified by congealed blood, proving that the animal had been a sacrifice (Winlock 1923:24). Bulls' heads were found depicted on offering tables<sup>30</sup>, and were clearly of some importance.

Real as well as symbolic meat was offered to the gods in their temples, and to the dead in their cult chapels. Bulls were sacrificed only on special occasions. Apparently the optimum age for sacrifice was around two years (Burleigh & Clutton-Brock 1980:152). Animals were sometimes specifically fattened for offering (Strudwick 2006:400).

When killing a bull, its back legs were first tied together, which allowed the animal to be flipped more easily onto its back. It was killed with a quick, deep incision to the throat (Strudwick 2006:404). The first part of the bull to be removed was the foreleg, which was believed to be

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<sup>28</sup>The presence of bucrania in burials in Egypt and Nubia from this period shows that cattle were slaughtered in funerary or mortuary rites. These are discussed in more detail in *Chapter 1: Bucrania*.

<sup>29</sup>See for example the contracts of Hepzefa, Nomarch of Siût, in Reisner 1918.

<sup>30</sup>Discussed below.

imbued with magical power. It was the favourite part of the animal to be offered to either the gods or to the dead (Oakes & Gahlin 2004:358). The bull was then skinned and disembowelled (Strudwick 2006:404).



Figure 18: Wall painting depicting a calf being lead for sacrifice from Tomb 226 of Western Thebes.

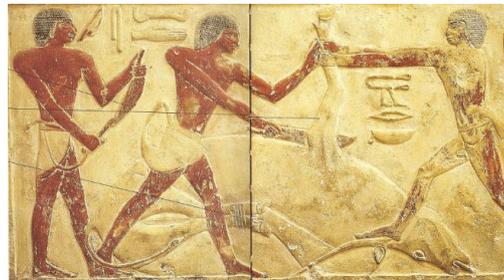


Figure 19: Scene depicting the slaughter of a bull from the tomb of Idout.

Various artworks from Egyptian tombs depict different stages of sacrifice. An inscribed relief in the Sixth Dynasty tomb of Mereruka shows a group of men lassoing a bull and trying to knock it over to prepare it for a ritual sacrifice (Baque 2002:44). A scene of offering bearers on a wall painting from Tomb 226 at Western Thebes include a man leading a calf. The animal is adorned with a garland of lotus flowers and buds and mandrake fruits [figure 18] (Aldred 1987:59). A painted relief from the tomb of princess Idout in Saqqara shows the ritual slaughter of a cow during a festival. The dead animal is dismembered by two men while their supervisor watches [figure 19] (Strudwick 2006:401). A wooden model from Tomb 366 at Beni-Hasan of the sacrifice of a black spotted bull represents a similar scene [figure 20] (Garstang 1903:98). The bull lies on its side with its legs tied together, while two men slit its throat. A third man stands at a low table, presumably to receive the internal organs of the animal.



Figure 20: Beni-Hasan wooden model.



Figure 21: Sacrificial bull's head from Illahun.

A sacrificial bull's head, dating to the Twelfth Dynasty, was excavated by Petrie in Illahun in the Fayum in northern Egypt [figure 21]. The animal was about two years old, and the fact that there were no pupal cases of flies suggests that it was buried straight after it was killed. Beneath the head the sand was caked and discoloured by some liquid. At first thought to be blood, it now seems likely that this liquid was the residue of a libation (Burleigh & Clutton-Brock 1980:151-2).

Offering tables were placed in the publicly accessible part of a tomb so that relatives and priests could leave regular offerings (Wilkinson 2005:177). The surface was often carved with a channel for liquid libations, and with images of food and drink. Most offering tables, such as that of Nakht from the Twelfth Dynasty which is in the Louvre, contain depictions of the foreleg of a bull [figure 22] (Fassone & Ferraris 2007:261). In some reliefs the head of the bull is included with the foreleg (Strudwick 2006:186).



Figure 22: Offering table of Nakht.



Figure 23: Soul house with the leg and head of a bull.

A specific type of offering table was called a soul house because early Egyptologists assumed they were the homes for spirits of the dead. In reality they served as offering trays for food offerings at the tomb (Stevenson Smith 1998:85). Made from clay, the offerings show a wide variety of foodstuffs, including meat. Some contain modelled parts of dismembered bulls. The foreleg was the most commonly depicted part, but there are examples with bull's heads [figure 23] (Wilkinson 2005:234).

There are abundant depictions of bull sacrifice from Egypt. Every stage of the sacrifice is depicted, from the capture of the bull, to the presentation of the bull, to the actual slaughter of

the bull. These are also depicted in a variety of media, including both relief sculpture and sculpture in the round, and in wall paintings. Offering tables, including soul houses, were decorated with images of food and drink which were meant to accompany the deceased to the afterlife. The head and foreleg of the bull were often included amongst these, demonstrating that the bull was sacrificed in mortuary rites.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Sacrifice played an important role in the lives of the peoples of the ancient Near East. Meant to provide sustenance to the gods, the sacrifice was either presented as a meal, such as in Mesopotamia, Egypt, Anatolia, and most of the Levant, or as a burnt offering, as by the ancient Israelites. Sacrifices were made by individuals as well as by groups of individuals and by communities. Regular, everyday sacrifices were performed by the temple personnel, and the animals sacrificed were temple property. It should be kept in mind that the property of the temple was conceived as being the property of the deity to whom the temple was dedicated. As such the sacrifice did not entail man giving up his own property. Rather, he prepared for the gods the provisions which the gods already possessed.

Artistic depictions of the slaughter of the bull for sacrifice are extremely rare in Mesopotamia. The two known examples, those on the Stele of the Vultures and the Ur-Nammu Stele, were both produced in the second half of the third millennium. Scenes depicting the slaying of the Bull of Heaven by Gilgamesh and Enkidu can also be understood as scenes of sacrifice. It is not always clear if depictions believed to represent sacrifice are indeed that. In banquet scenes, the bulls being led away for slaughter may be intended for food at a purely human feast. However, the religions of the peoples of the ancient Near East were so interwoven with their daily life that it is hard to believe that the gods were not involved and honoured in these meals.

In Hittite Anatolia, depictions of sacrifice are rare. As in Mesopotamia, depictions of banquet scenes most likely had some association with sacrifice, but this is not certain. Altars were more commonly depicted than was sacrifice. Hittite seals depicting a goddess in front of a table or altar demonstrate that sacrifices were meant for the nourishment and enjoyment of the gods.

These are the only representations which reveal the intended purpose of the sacrifice. The altar from Savcılı is unique because it is shaped like two bulls. The altar from Uqair was similarly decorated with images of bulls. Although these two pieces are separated by about 2 000 years, they suggest that bulls were consistently associated with sacrifice.

The system of sacrifice for which we have the most detail is that of the Israelites. This evidence comes predominantly from biblical texts, and can be illustrated by the horned altars found at sites such as Meggido and Beersheba. There are, however, no artistic representations of bull sacrifice from the Levant.

There are more depictions of bull sacrifice from Egypt than from any other area of the ancient Near East. Also, unlike the other areas of the ancient Near East, the iconographic sources far outnumber the textual sources regarding sacrifice. Every stage and aspect of the sacrifice are depicted in a variety of media. Images of the bull do not appear to have decorated altars as they did in the other areas of the ancient Near East.

## CHAPTER 10: BULL-LEAPING

*Depictions of bull-leaping are found in Egypt, Anatolia, the Levant, and on Minoan Crete. Four main types of bull-leap are identified, and the depictions of bull-leaping are classified according to these types and studied in order to discern any patterns.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Bull-leaping was illustrated in Middle Bronze Age art of the late third- to mid-second millennium from the Mediterranean to the Indus Valley<sup>1</sup>. The most famous representations of bull-leaping come from Minoan Crete. In the ancient Near East, evidence for the practice survives in artworks from the Levant, Egypt and Anatolia, and in rare texts from the Levant and Anatolia.

Younger (1976) recognises three main types of bull-leaps<sup>2</sup>. The first type is the classic type of depiction in which the leaper approaches the bull from the front and grasps the bull by its horns. The bull jerks its head up, throwing the leaper over its head. The leaper executes a backflip, and lands feet-first on the bull's back. The leaper then jumps off the back of the bull, where assistants may help with the dismount.

The second main type of bull-leap, which Younger terms the "Schema of the Diving Leaper", requires the leaper to begin from a position above the bull's head, either from the ground while the bull's head is lowered, or from a podium, or from the shoulders of an assistant. The leaper dives to the bull's shoulders, executes a handspring and backflip, and lands feet-first on the ground behind the bull. The Schema of the Diving Leaper is the most commonly depicted type of bull-leap.

The third main type of bull-leap is depicted in what Younger terms the "Schema of the Floating Leaper", and is represented in depictions where the leaper is consistently in "one static, though pleasing, pose above the bull" (1976:132). The entire sequence of the bull-leap cannot be

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<sup>1</sup>Depictions from the Greek mainland and the Indus Valley will not be discussed.

<sup>2</sup>Younger studies the Bronze Age Minoan and Mycenaean bull-leap depictions from Crete and mainland Greece. The depictions of bull-leaping from the ancient Near East can also be divided along the lines of the different types of bull-leap which he identifies.

reconstructed from this one pose, and it is possible that the intention was artistic, and that what was being illustrated was not an actual method of bull-leaping. It is also possible, however, that the pose represents a leap in which the leaper approached from one side and leaped over to the other side, instead of approaching the bull head-on.

Guillaume and Blockman (2004) identify a fourth type of bull-leap. Some representations of bull-leaps depict a leaper beneath the bull. This pose is conventionally understood to depict the prostrate figure of an unsuccessful leaper (Kyle 2007:42). Guillaume and Blockman, however, compare the pose to a ritual still practised in the Beqaa Valley in east Lebanon in the early twentieth century CE in which “not only the bull was leaped over, but the bull could also leaped (sic) over the participant”, and suggest that it demonstrates another element of a ritual which involved passing beneath the bull.

These four main types of bull-leap can be compared to a type of bull-sport known as the *recortes* which is practised in some parts of Spain. This is a far less violent alternative to the more famous Spanish bullfight, or *corrida de toros*, in which matadors fight and kill bulls. In the *recortes*, athletes known as *recortadores* dodge and leap over bulls without the use of the props, such as capes and swords, which the matadors use. Poles are sometimes used to vault over the bull, but more commonly a bull-leap is executed. The most common type of bull-leap performed by the *recortadores* is one in which the *recortador* leaps straight over the bull, and rolls upon landing [figure 1], but various types of somersault are also executed.



Figure 1: Spanish recortador executing a bull-leap.

The known ancient Near Eastern and Minoan depictions of bull-leaping will be examined in the

context of the four main types of bull-leaping depictions and, where appropriate, the Spanish recortes, to determine which, if any, could have been executed in real life. This, in turn, will help determine if the peoples of the ancient Near East were familiar with and had first-hand knowledge of bull-leaping, and whether it ever occurred as a practice in the ancient Near East.

## 2. MINOAN CRETE

### 2.1 The Bull-leaping Fresco at Knossos

The most well-known representation of bull-leaping from the ancient world is the Bull-leaping, or Toreador, Fresco from the Palace at Knossos on Crete<sup>3</sup> [figure 2]. The frescoes at Knossos have been dated by a study of stylistic details to the Late Minoan II-III A Period, circa 1450-1375. A series of five panels have been restored, but it has only been possible to restore the entire composition of one of these (Preziosi & Hitchcock 1999:167-9).



Figure 2: The Bull-Leaping Fresco from Knossos

This frieze depicts a bull-leap in which a figure vaults over the back of a bull, while a second figure stands behind the bull, and a third stands in front of the bull, holding its horns. This depiction conforms to Younger's Schema of the Diving Leaper. The leaping figure's skin is painted brown, while the two standing figures are painted white. The artistic convention at

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<sup>3</sup>While Crete is technically not a part of the ancient Near East, it would be impossible to study the subject without examining the Bull-Leaping Fresco and other examples of bull-leap depictions from Crete.

Knossos was to portray women with white skin, while men were portrayed with darker skin<sup>4</sup> (Raney & Bryant 2006:8). This identifies the leaping figure as male, and the two standing figures as female. Despite this convention, there has been argument over the gender of these figures. It has been argued that the three figures narrate three stages of a bull leap (Preziosi & Hitchcock 1999:169; Kyle 2007:41). In this reading, the figure on the left grasps the horns of the bull in preparation for the leap, the second figure is in the process of leaping after having been tossed by the bull over its back, and the figure on the right has just completed the bull-leap. If the Bull-Leaping Fresco did indeed represent three consecutive stages of a bull-leap, it would be logical for the figures to all be the same sex. In addition, as Castelden (1990:133) points out, the figure on the right faces the wrong way to have landed from the leap shown. The fresco must then depict a group of bull-leapers. While it is possible that, as Hood (1987:60) suggests, the figure on the left holds the bull's horns in preparation to leap, it is more likely that this figure is grappling the bull in order to distract it or keep its head down, making the leap easier for the central figure. The figure on the right stands ready to catch the central figure after their successful leap.

Another fresco from Knossos shows a female figure lying beneath a bull. Although Younger (1976:134) recognises that the pose of this figure resembles that of his Floating Leaper schema, it would represent the fourth type of bull-leap identified by Guillaume and Blockman in which the leaper passes under the bull.

## 2.2 Sculptures in the Round

A bronze composition from Rethymnon on the northern coast of Crete, dating to around the sixteenth century and now housed in the British Museum, depicts a charging bull with a male figure somersaulting over its back [figure 3]. Evans (1921:249) seemed uncertain about the method of manufacture, stating that “the bronze is not hollow as in the later *cire perdue*<sup>5</sup> process; on the other hand, there is no trace of a joint such as often seen by a double mould.” Today it is generally accepted (Aruz *et al* 2008:135; Higgins 1981:6) to have been cast by the lost-wax technique. According to Younger (1976:126) this is one of only seven definite depictions of the

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<sup>4</sup>A convention also employed in ancient Egypt.

<sup>5</sup>*Cire perdue* is the French term for lost-wax casting.

first type of bull-leap<sup>6</sup>, all of which are from Crete<sup>7</sup>. The bull is depicted in the flying gallop pose, famous from the Knossos frescoes. The male figure arches his back to somersault over the bull. His feet touch the bull's back, and his long hair trails on the bull's head, providing the support necessary to depict this figure in midair. Evans (1921:252) argues that the hands were deliberately left out for aesthetic reasons. They could equally possibly have been broken by accident (Younger 1976:126), or the bronze might not have reached the extremities of the mould (Aruz *et al* 2008:135). Bulls naturally tend to shake their heads from side to side when attempting to throw something from their horns (Younger 1976:135). The first type of bull-leap, in which the bull jerks its head back to toss the leaper onto its back, could not have been executed unless the bull was somehow trained to throw its head backwards, which is unlikely.



Figure 3: Bronze from Rethymnon

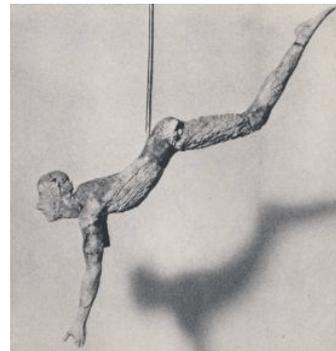


Figure 4: Ivory figure from Knossos.

An ivory figure of a bull-leaper dating to circa 1600 was found at Knossos [figure 4]. The bull has not survived to the present day, but the pose of the figure clearly identifies him as in the process of somersaulting over a bull. Where the figure from Rethymnon has completed a backflip and has landed with his feet on the bull's back, this ivory figure is in the process of the backflip. Because the bull has been lost it is impossible to determine which type of bull-leap is depicted. The figure could have been grasping the bull by its horns, in which case the first type of bull-leap would be depicted. The position of the hands makes it more likely that they would have been placed on the upper back of the bull, and the figure therefore depicts the Schema of

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<sup>6</sup>The other six depictions are found on seal impressions.

<sup>7</sup>The vase from Hüseyindede, which will be discussed below, is a possible exception, although the pose of the leaper on the vase is somewhat controversial.

the Diving Leaper.

### 2.3 The Boxer Rhyton

The remains of the Boxer Rhyton [figure 5] were found at Agia Triadha in south central Crete, and date to about 1600 to 1500 (Crowther 2007:36). The Boxer Rhyton has been heavily restored and is so called because three of its four registers depict scenes of boxing or wrestling. The fourth register, that second from the top, shows a man being gored by a bull. Castleden (1990:132) believes that this depicts a scene of a bull-leaper who has been unsuccessful in his leap, and is being tossed by the bull.



Figure 5: The Boxer Rhyton (detail).



Figure 6: Agate seal from Crete.

### 2.4 Glyptic Representations

Several seals and seal impressions depicting different types of bull-leaps have been found on Crete. The first type of leap is represented on an agate seal which shows a figure leaping over one bull while a second figure stands in front of another bull, presumably preparing to leap [figure 6].

A seal impression from Knossos depicts a bull and a bull-leaper at a cubical structure [figure 7]. The bull's forefeet are on the box, while its back feet are on the ground. The leaper is in the process of diving through the bull's horns. Although it is possible that this depiction represents a failed bull-leap, the pose and position of the figure fit well with the conventional depictions of the second type of bull-leap. However, if the figure is using the box as a platform from which to dive, it does not explain why the forefeet of the bull are on the structure. The pose of the

figure and the pose of the bull therefore seem at odds with each other.



Figure 7: Seal impression of bull and bull-leaper at a cubical structure.



Figure 8: Bronze ring with bull-leaper

Bronze rings with gold overlays which have representations of bull-leaping have been found on both Crete and mainland Greece [figure 8]. The human figure has two hands on the bull's back while somersaulting over the bull and therefore depicts the second type, the Schema of the Diving Leaper.

The bull-leaping depictions from Minoan Crete represent a variety of different types of leap. It is the only area which has depictions of the first type of leap, which is impossible to execute. Although these bull-leaping depictions could cast doubt on whether bull-leaping was practised on the island, there are more than enough depictions of other, possible, types of bull-leaping to assume that there was familiarity with the practice. The evidence for bull-leaping on Minoan Crete is conflicting, but this could be explained by the artists who created the works being unfamiliar with the practice. If the artists did not know how a bull-leap was executed, they would choose to represent a pose which they found the most pleasing, or which was the most practical for them to represent in the medium in which they worked. This would apply particularly to sculpture in the round because it has limitations which two-dimensional art does not have. One such limitation is how to secure pieces together to make the unit less likely to break. This could explain the pose of the composition from Rethymnon, the most famous of the first type of depiction. The figure's legs are on the bull's lower back and the hair trails over the bull's head. This secures the figure to the bull in a way that no other type of depiction would have allowed.

### 3. THE LEVANT

#### 3.1 Glyptic Representations

A number of seals from Syria dating to around 1700 depicting bull-leaping provide earlier examples of bull-leaping (Collon 2005:155-6). Many of the bull-leaping scenes in Syrian glyptic are juxtaposed with scenes of animal combat or hunting (Aruz *et al* 2008:132). This may point to an origin in hunting for the sport of bull-leaping.

A haematite seal currently on anonymous loan to the Metropolitan Museum in New York was once housed in Basle in the Erlenmeyer Collection [figure 9] (Aruz *et al* 2008:133; Collon 2005:156). It shows a robed figure before the Storm God. Behind this figure a man stands in front of a charging bull while two other men are doing handstands on its back. The first man may be attempting to control the bull (Aruz *et al* 2008:133), or he may be preparing to leap over the animal (Rice 1998:158). Two acrobats can not execute a bull-leap simultaneously in the manner depicted on this seal. In the modern-day recortes two recortadores are know to simultaneously leap over the bull, but both leapers approach the bull head-on [figure 10]. It is also possible that two leapers approach the bull from the side, but it seems improbable that the bull would not turn to face them, unless it was restrained. It is possible then that the depiction on the seal represents a simultaneous bull-leap, but for matters of artistic expression this was depicted in a manner which would be physically impossible to execute. It is also possible that this representation has some sort of ritual or symbolic significance, and does not depict an actual bull-leap.



Figure 9: Syrian cylinder seal.



Figure 10: Two recortadores executing a simultaneous bull-leap.

A seal from slightly earlier, the impression of which was found at Aleppo, shows a series of bull-leaps over the same bull [figure 11]. The first figure somersaults over the bull's head, a second

is in the air above the bull's back, while a third lands behind the bull. The poses of these figures bears a resemblance to a type of bull-leap performed by Spanish recortadores in which a sideways somersault is executed over the bull. This would explain the different directions in which the leaping figures face as well as the direction which the figure behind the bull faces. A fourth figure lies beneath the bull. If Guillaume and Blockman's theory that this kind of depiction represents a different form of bull-leaping is correct, then this seal provides a further example of this kind of leap. This seal therefore provides the best evidence for an actual bull-leap.

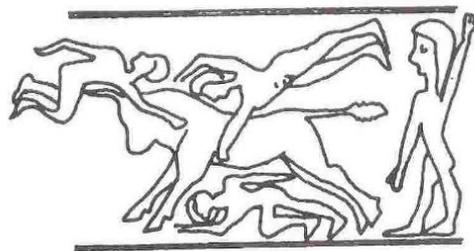


Figure 11: Seal impression from Aleppo.

Raney and Bryant (2006:7) suggest that bull-leaping originated in the ancient Near East, specifically in modern-day Syria, and spread to Minoan Crete. The depictions on the seals are the oldest definitive evidence for the practice of bull-leaping, which supports this theory.

### 3.2 Written Sources

Another possible reference to bull-leaping can be found in the Bible. Guillaume and Blockman (2004) argue that the word שׁוֹר which is usually translated as 'wall' in Psalm 18:30<sup>8</sup> and 2 Samuel 22:30 should be translated as 'bull'. According to their translation, this verse reads, "Because of you I run (in) the enclosure and by my god I leap a bull." When the other evidence for bull-leaping in the Levant and across the ancient world is taken into account, this translation with reference to bull-leaping is not as out of place as it would at first seem.

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<sup>8</sup>Guillaume and Blockman quote Psalm 18:30 of the Tanach. In the Christian Bible the verse is Psalm 18:29.

Although the bull-leaping depictions from ancient Canaan are the oldest, the evidence they provide is not the best. The cylinder seal impression now housed in the Metropolitan Museum depicts two bull-leapers executing a bull-leap which would be impossible to execute in the manner in which it is depicted. The seal impression from Aleppo depicts bull-leaps which would be possible to execute, but it is uncertain where the seal which made this impression originated. The Biblical passages, as translated by Guillaume and Blockman, provide supporting evidence that bull-leaping was practised, but it is not certain if this translation is accurate.

#### 4. EGYPT

##### 4.1 The Bull-Leaping Frescoes from Avaris

The remains of bull-leaping frescoes were found at Palace F in the northwest of Avaris<sup>9</sup> [figure 12] (Aruz *et al* 2008:131, Rice 1998:154). The frescoes were found in the remains of a Hyksos palace. There are no other known depictions in Egypt of acrobats or of bull-leaping from the Hyksos Period. According to Kyle (2007:45), the lack of depictions suggests that bull-leaping did not take place in Egypt, while Cline (1998:211) argues that this lack of representation indicates that the Avaris frescoes could have been painted at the instigation of Minoan expatriates. However, the Hyksos rule lasted only about a century, so it is not surprising that no other such remains have been found dating to the Hyksos Period.

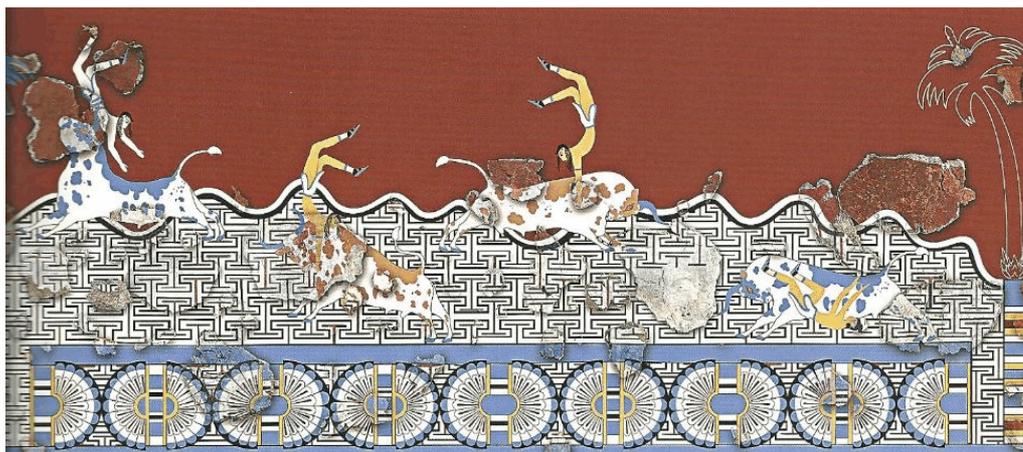


Figure 12: Fresco from Avaris (detail)

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<sup>9</sup>The ancient site of Avaris (modern Tell el-Dab'a) was the capital of the Hyksos in the northern Delta region of Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period.

The wall paintings were originally made by applying fresco and secco to a hard lime-plaster prepared with crushed murex shells, the same technique as was used for the Minoan frescoes at Knossos (Manley 2003:166). The style of painting and the motifs used are also reminiscent of the frescoes at Knossos. These two facts suggest that these works were produced by the same artists or school of artists which worked at Knossos (Aruz *et al* 2008:131). The Knossos frescoes were the first, and by far the more famous, to be discovered and excavated, but those at Avaris are thought to be the earliest such frescoes to be painted. Because the style and subject matter of the Avaris frescoes is so similar to the Minoan frescoes at Knossos, Tyldesley (2007:41) argues that Minoan artists were employed “to depict the purely Minoan ritual of bull leaping.” Acrobats, like artists and musicians, travelled to work as specialists in foreign courts (Aruz *et al* 2008:133), so even if bull-leaping did originate in the Aegean, this would not have been the only place it was practised. Furthermore, while it is possible that the Avaris frescoes were produced by Minoan artists or artists working in what was a Minoan tradition, there is clearly sufficient evidence to dispute the claim that bull-leaping was a “purely Minoan ritual”.

Only about ten to fifteen percent of the paintings are preserved (Manely 2003:167), making reconstruction of the frieze extremely difficult. There are two bull-leaping scenes. In the first the bull-leapers have yellow skin and leap over white bulls with blue or brown spots. The background of this scene is a maze-pattern, which may represent a bull-leaping courtyard (Tyldesley 2007:41). The second scene portrays brown-skinned athletes leaping over white bulls with brown or black spots against a yellow background.

Various stages of the leap are represented on the two frescoes. Some figures are shown doing handstands on the backs of a bull. One of the bulls on the first scene looks towards the viewer while a human figure vaults over its shoulder.

The second scene also contains a depiction of human triumph over the bull (Manley 2003:168). A bull rests on the ground with its tongue hanging out while one human figure holds it by its neck and horn. A second figure stands in front of the bull with his hands pointing down.



Figure 13: Figure looking towards the viewer from Avaris Fresco.

Also in the second scene, a figure looks towards the viewer while somersaulting over a bull [figure 13]. Both of this figure's hands rest on the side of the bull which faces the viewer. Other leaping figures from the Avaris and Knossos frescoes are illustrated with one hand on each side of the bull and clearly depict Younger's Schema of the Diving Leaper. Because both hands are on the same side of the bull, this figure represents the variation in which the leaper approaches the bull from one side rather than approaching the bull head-on.

#### 4.2. The Beni Hasan Mural

Tomb 29 at Beni Hasan<sup>10</sup>, belonging to the Middle Kingdom nomarch Baqt, contains a mural on the south wall of men grappling with a bull [figure 14]. Five figures try to secure the bull to the ground with ropes, while a sixth is shown above the bull between its horns. The scene is located near a wrestling scene. According to Kyle (2007:45) this mural depicts a bull-leap, and "the juxtaposition of bull-leaping and wrestling brings to mind the Minoan boxer rhyton". The pose of the supposedly leaping figure above the bull's head does not conform to that of any type of bull-leap. He is facing the incorrect way to be executing the first or second type of bull-leap, and is too far forward to represent the Schema of the Floating Leaper. It is more likely that, as Rice (1998:138) suggests, this figure has been thrown by the bull, rather than that he is performing a bull-leap.

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<sup>10</sup>Beni Hasan is located on the east bank of the Nile in Middle Egypt. The limestone cliffs at the site contain a series of rock-cut tombs made for the nomarchs of the sixteenth nome.

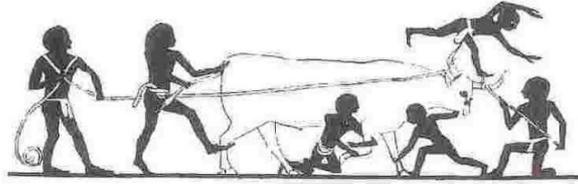


Figure 14: Beni Hasan mural.

#### 4.3. The Wooden Box from Kahun

A wooden box from Kahun in Egypt from the Eighteenth Dynasty, now housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, shows a man leaping over a galloping bull [figure 15]. The man is almost lying across the bull's back, rather than leaping, which, according to Aruz, Benzel and Evans (2008:132) may be because of space limitations. This figure is facing the incorrect way to be executing a somersault over the back of the bull unless a twist was included in the somersault. This type of leap is known from the modern day recortes and would also account for the position of the figure behind the bull in the Bull-Leaping Fresco at Knossos if that fresco had depicted different stages of the same leap. The figure could also represent a bull-leap in which the leaper approached the bull from the side. In either case, although the leap at first appears not to conform to any of Evan's types of bull-leap, the depiction may represent a variation of his third type. Another man lies on his stomach beneath the bull. This pose is conventionally understood to depict the prostrate figure of an unsuccessful bull-leaper (Kyle 2007:42). Guillaume and Blockman (2004), however, believe that it demonstrates another element of a ritual which involved passing beneath the bull.

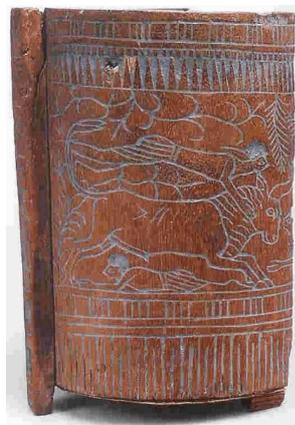


Figure 15: Wooden box from Kahun.

The examples from Egypt seem to depict bull-leaps which were executed by approaching the bull from the side. This type of bull-leap would have been much less dangerous and easier to perform than a bull-leap which approached the bull head-on, and are therefore more likely to depict actual bull-leaps. One example from Avaris shows the human triumph over the bull, which points to the purpose of bull-leaping depictions. Bull-leaping was a display of man's control over the bull, and can be seen as a display of power. Those who lived in the palaces which had bull-leaping frescoes displayed on their walls could by extension claim similar power and the depictions can be seen as an implicit symbolic display of their authority.

## 5. ANATOLIA

### 5.1 The Çatalhöyük Wall Painting

A wall painting from Level V at Çatalhöyük contains a scene in which a huge bull is surrounded by human figures [figure 16]. According to Rice (1998:81) a small figure leaps across the bull's back, seemingly having lost part or all of his loincloth on the bull's horns. If the standard reconstruction of this wall painting is correct, the pose of the figure is unusual and the figure does appear to be somersaulting on the bull's back. But the section of wall above the bull is broken and badly damaged, which makes it difficult, if not impossible, to reconstruct the upper part of the painting with certainty. Rice's interpretation ignores the conventions of art at Çatalhöyük, where a lack of perspective meant that human figures were situated all around the bull. The alleged bull-leaper in this scene is not leaping the bull, but on the other side of the bull to the viewer. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that other animals are also depicted with human figures above them in the same scene. Stags and boars do not have the strength to throw humans over them, so it is hardly likely that stag- and boar-leaping were activities in which the people of Çatalhöyük took part.



Figure 16: Wall painting from Çatalhöyük.

No other depiction of bull-leaping exists in the nearly four millennia which passed between the Çatalhöyük scene and the works representing bull-leaping from the Middle Bronze Age to show a continuation of this activity. This makes it unlikely that the wall painting represents a bull-leap, but this does not mean that bull-leaping did not originate and develop from the hunting of wild bulls.

## 5.2 The Relief Vessel with Bull Leapers from Hüseyindede

Excavations at the Old Hittite site of Hüseyindede uncovered a relief vessel with bull-leapers dating to the seventeenth century [figure 17]. The vase has only one register which depicts thirteen people in two groups surrounding a bull. Some of these figures dance and play instruments, while others are shown in different stages of leaping the bull. Luwian texts<sup>11</sup> describe a bull-leaping ritual which was accompanied by dancing and music. This relief vessel most likely illustrates this ritual (Aruz *et al* 2008:133-4). One figure stands before the bull, ready to grab hold of the bull's horns to begin executing the leap or securing the bull. Another is in the process of the leap, with both arms and legs on the bull's back. The pose of this figure conforms neither to the first depiction in which the feet would be on the bull, but the arms in the air or on the horns; nor the second type in which the arms would be on the back, but the legs in the air. Behind the bull another figure is completing the leap. The figure dismounting the bull also appears to be somersaulting, but faces the wrong direction for a dismount from the position of the central leaping figure. The two figures cannot represent the same type of bull-leap, and the differences cast doubt on whether they depict any actual bull-leap.



Figure 17: Relief vase from Hüseyindede (detail).

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<sup>11</sup>Discussed below.

### 5.3 Alalakh

#### 5.3.1 *The Krater*

During the 2006 and 2007 excavation seasons at Alalakh, a site on the Amuq plain on the modern border between Syria and Turkey, fragments of at least one Mycenaean krater with a bull-leaping scene were found at the large Southern Fortress [figure 18] (Aslihan Yener 2007). The image on the krater<sup>12</sup> shows a spotted bull galloping to the right while a bull-leaper completes a bull-leap. All that survives of this bull-leaper are his right leg and left arm which have been reconstructed to depict a figure which appears to be falling face-first towards the ground, rather than dismounting neatly. Instead, it may depict a bull-leap in which the acrobat leaps headfirst straight over the bull and executes a roll on landing. According to Aslihan Yener (2008), the krater has been dated to the fourteenth century and is therefore contemporary with the Minoan frescoes. Although found at Alalakh, the piece is Mycenaean ware and is representative of bull-leaping from mainland Greece. Its presence at Alalakh is indicative of cultural exchange between Alalakh and Mycenaean Greece, and is also suggestive of a shared tradition of bull-leaping between the two.



Figure 18: Mycenaean krater from Alalakh.

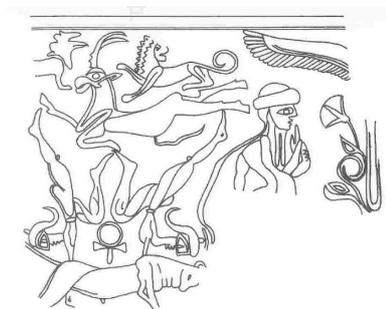


Figure 19: Cylinder seal from Alalakh.

#### 5.3.2 *The Cylinder Seal*

An impression of a seal on a fragment of a clay envelope from about 1700 was found in the archive room of a palace at Alalakh [figure 19] (Collon 2003:100). It bears the impression of a seal belonging to one Rabut-ilisnu (Rice 1998:158). Two figures are shown performing

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<sup>12</sup>A krater was a large bowl in which wine and water were mixed.

handstands on the back of a galloping bull, facing each other in perfect symmetry. Their pose is nearly identical to the seal impression found at Aleppo, which suggests that they share a common tradition. An *ankh* sign found on the back of the bull between the two figures points to the act having some religious or symbolic significance. The seal which made this impression has not been found, but the style is similar to the Syrian cylinder seal now housed in the Metropolitan Museum. The seal which made the impression on the clay envelope from Alalakh is therefore most likely of Syrian origin.

#### 5.4 Textual Sources

While there are ample iconographical sources to illustrate bull-leaping, references in ancient texts are difficult to find. Luwian texts describe a bull-leaping ritual which was accompanied by music and dance (Aruz *et al* 2008:134). A Luwian text dated to the fourteenth century is discussed by Güterbock (2003:127-129). The text has tentatively been reconstructed to describe a ritual in which “[One young man] leaps [on a bull]. They call out [...] to the bull. And the Lallupiya-men call out [...] to the cupbearer. [The cupbearer] gets up.” Although the reconstruction of this text is not certain and therefore does not prove that bull-leaping formed part of the ritual, when the contemporary iconographic material depicting bull-leaping is considered, it seems probable that this text does represent a textual example of the iconographic sources.

The bull-leap depictions from Anatolia do not represent bull-leaps which could have been executed. Those from Alalakh represent variations of Evans’ third type of bull leap, but do not appear to have been manufactured at Alalakh. The krater is a Mycenaean ware, and the seal is most likely from Syria. These pieces therefore do not represent a bull-leaping tradition at Alalakh. These facts cast doubt over whether bull-leaping was practised in Anatolia. However, the Luwian texts reveal that a bull-leaping ritual was practised. The problems in the depiction of bull-leaping on the Hüseyindede vessel must be due to a lack of familiarity with the execution of bull-leaps by the artists who produced the vessel.

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

Depictions of bull-leaping suggest that the practice was familiar to peoples across the ancient Near East except in Mesopotamia where no representations of the activity occur. Some of the supposed examples of depictions of bull-leaping, such as the wall painting from Beni Hasan and the Boxer Rhyton, exhibit poses which can be better described as a figure which is being tossed by the bull, and not as a bull-leap.

The first type of bull-leap, in which the leaper grabs hold of the bull's horns in order to somersault over the bull, is found exclusively in depictions from Crete, unless the relief vessel from Hüseyindede also depicts such a leap. This type of bull-leap is impossible to execute. Even if the first type of bull-leap could not be executed in actuality, this does not mean that the remaining three types could also not have been, particularly if the bull was somehow restrained. There are sufficient examples of depictions of the other three main kinds of bull-leap from Crete to suggest that bull-leaping was practised on the island.

The bull-leaping frescoes from Avaris are clearly of the same tradition as those from Knossos. The Hyksos are now generally accepted to have originated from near Byblos in the Levant. The frescoes at Avaris therefore may have been produced by craftsmen and artists from this area. There are numerous representations of bulls and acrobats from the Canaanite area, but the only evidence of bull-leaping is the seals and their impressions which bear designs of bull-leaps, and the possible references in the Bible. The representations on the seals could be of Minoan inspiration and would therefore not reflect a Canaanite tradition. The seals are, however, the oldest definitive evidence we have for bull-leaping, which suggests rather that bull-leaping originated in modern-day Syria.

The wooden box from Kahun is a clear example of the fourth type of bull-leap proposed by Guillaume and Blockman in which the leaper dives under the bull. This type of leap is known to have been practised in the early twentieth century CE. The figure leaping over the bull performs a leap which passes from one side of a bull to the other. This type of leap would be much less dangerous than approaching the bull head-on and is therefore more likely to have been performed. The seal impression from Aleppo also contains a depiction of this fourth type of leap

in which the leaper passes under the bull, as well a series of leaps over the bull which appear to correlate with the known bull-leaps of the present-day recortadores of Spain. The wooden box from Kahun and the seal impression from Aleppo therefore provide the best evidence for the types of bull-leap which may actually have occurred.

The fragments of the krater found at Alalakh come from a Mycenaean krater, and do not represent an indigenous representation. Similarly, while a seal impression bearing a bull-leap was found at Alalakh, the seal which made the impression has not been found. The style of this impression is similar to the Syrian cylinder seal in the Metropolitan Museum, which means that the seal impression from Alalakh is from a seal of Syrian origin. The examples of bull-leaping depictions from Alalakh therefore do not represent a bull-leaping tradition at Alalakh.

The Alalakh seal impression and the Metropolitan Museum seal depict two figures simultaneously performing handstands on the back of a bull, an action which could never have been executed. These depictions may represent a bull-leap in which two acrobats simultaneously leaped over the bull, either head on or from the side. The representation of two figures performing handstands rather than bull-leaps may therefore be due to artistic considerations. This type of leap represents a variation of the Evans' third type of leap. It would have been much more difficult to execute than the more common solo bull-leap, and it is possible therefore it represents a bull-leap of particular significance. This is supported by the fact that an *ankh* is found between the two acrobats on the seal impression from Alalakh, which points to the bull-leap having some religious or ritual significance.

The Luwian texts which describe bull-leaping place it in the context of a ritual, and the bull-leaping depiction on the relief vessel from Hüseyindede is likewise placed in a ritual setting. The figures executing the bull-leap do not conform to any of the four main types of bull-leap, and do not even appear to perform the same type of leap. Because the texts tell us that bull-leaping occurred, the inaccuracies on this vase must be due to a lack of knowledge of bull-leaping by those who made the vessel. The bull-leap depiction stands apart from the other examples because of its clear ritual contexts and because of the depiction itself, which suggests it represents an independent tradition. Although the Hüseyindede vase is the only object which

exhibits a clear ritual context, the *ankh* between the two leaping figures on the seal impression from Alalakh suggests the act was religious or symbolic in nature in other areas as well.

The supposed bull-leaping scene from Çatalhöyük was painted four millennia before the other known bull-leaping depictions and cannot be associated with them. It does point to the origin of bull-leaping as a ritual which developed from early hunts in which the wild animals were captured with lassoes and nets. Bull-leaping then can be seen as a display of the triumph of humanity over animals, and of civilization over nature. Bull-leaping became associated with authority, and in particular with power in Knossos. The geographic extent of bull-leap depictions could represent a diffusion of a symbol of authority, rather than demonstrate that bull-leaping was practised across the ancient world. There is no physical evidence that bull-leaping was ever practised in the ancient Near Eastern mainland or on Minoan Crete. However, the bull hunt is a far more obvious metaphor for authority and for the control over nature and the uncivilised, and that bull-leaping was depicted at all suggests that it was practised at the time the representations were produced, or at least in living memory.

## CHAPTER 11: THE BULL AND COMPOSITE FIGURES AS PROTECTIVE BEINGS

*The bull was a powerful figure and a symbol of strength to the peoples of the ancient Near East. It was natural then that they would try to harness this power for protection. Bulls and composite figures with bovine characteristics acted as protective figures to people of all social standing across the ancient Near East, from the Prehistoric Period until the time of the Persian Empire.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The bull was a potent symbol of power and strength. It is natural then that man would try to harness this power for his own benefit. In this manner, the bull and composite bull figures were used in various forms to grant protection to man.

In Egypt the sphinx, a composite creature with the body of a lion and the head of a human, often acted as a guardian flanking the entrances to temples. The most famous sphinx is the sphinx at Giza which forms part of Khafre's funerary complex, while an avenue of ram-headed sphinxes lines the entrance to the Karnak Temple complex in Luxor. Sphinxes and lions were also popular gateway guardians in the Levant and Anatolia.

Similarly, bulls and composite figures with characteristics of the bull, such as bull-men and human-headed bulls, acted as apotropaic (protective) figures in the northern Levant and Mesopotamia. Composite bull figures were found mainly, but not exclusively, in Mesopotamia. They were collected into a definitive series during the Neo-Assyrian Period, and, unlike malevolent beings, there are many representations of them in art and they are iconographically well defined (Green 1995:1849).

Human-headed bulls are first attested in the art of the Early Dynastic Period in Mesopotamia, and continue to appear until the Achaemenid Period. They are identified as *lamassu*, protective figures which were originally associated with the Sun God Shamash (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:440; Green 1995:1848). Human-headed bulls were as a rule masculine<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Barnett (1950:36) a bronze figure of a *lamassu* which adorned the throne from Toprakkale [figure 25] is female, but the upper, human, part of the figure is almost identical to a statuette of a man also found at Toprakkale and now in the Vorderasiatische Museum in Berlin, which identifies this *lamassu* figure as male.

The bull-man was a figure with the face and upper body of a man, and the lower body and ears and horns of a bull<sup>2</sup>. Bull-men are found in art from the Early Dynastic Period, and by the Kassite Period they had become magically protective demons. They are still found in the art of the Achaemenid Period (Black & Green 1992:49; Green 1995:1848).

The Assyrian gateway guardians are the most famous examples of the use of the bull as a protective being, but they are not the earliest. The bull was a symbol of strength and martial power to the peoples of the ancient Near East, and its use as an apotropaic figure can be traced back to the beginnings of civilization. This use will be traced from the Neolithic Period until the Persian Period to reveal developments in its use.

## 2. BULL'S HEAD AMULETS

The earliest evidence for bulls as apotropaic figures comes from the small amulets of bulls' heads which have been found across the ancient Near East. The bull's head would have symbolised the entire beast. The bull was a powerful animal, and the amulets were meant to tap this power to afford the wearer protection from malevolent forces (Hornblower 1929:39). The earliest examples are the Early Neolithic small stone plaques which resemble miniature bucrania from Hallan Çemi in Turkey (Gates 1995:212). The best executed stone models of bucrania from Mesopotamia date to the Halaf Period. Amulets of this sort have been found at a number of sites including Arpachiyah (Roux 1992:56) as well as sites further to the east, such as Susa (Mallowan 1947:115).

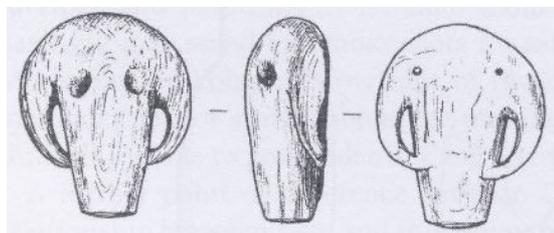


Figure 1: Badarian Period ivory bull's head amulet.

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<sup>2</sup>The Bull-man is discussed in more detail in *Chapter 3: Contest Scenes*.

The bull's head is the oldest form of amulet found in Egypt (Petrie 1901:26). Examples survive from as early as the Neolithic Badarian Period [figure 1] (Gordon & Schwabe 2004:33). Made from stone, bone and ivory, there was a dramatic increase in their manufacture during the Gerzean and Semainean (Naqada I and Naqada II) periods (Romano 1995:1607). That they had a means of suspension indicates that they were not merely grave goods, but were meant for personal adornment by the living. This makes them among the earliest such items from ancient Egypt (Hornblower 1929:38).

### 3. MESOPOTAMIA

#### 3.1 Mesopotamia in the Third and Second Millennium

##### 3.1.1 *Reclining Androcephalous Bulls*

The earliest examples of androcephalous<sup>3</sup> bulls date from the Early Dynastic Period. An arm-rest in the shape of a human-headed bull from a throne from Khafajeh [figure 2] and a pouring vessel with one in relief [figure 3] are currently housed in the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. On a lamp now in the British Museum the body of the bull is carved in relief while the human head is carved in the round [figure 4]. The style of these three pieces differs greatly, although the iconography of the creature is consistent. The androcephalous bull is lying down with its legs folded beneath its body. The human face is bearded and is surrounded by a mass of hair. Two horns emerge from the top of the creature's head. This pose and general appearance were to remain the same for androcephalous bulls throughout the third and second millennia.

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<sup>3</sup>To be androcephalous means to have a human head on the body of an animal.



Figure 2: Arm-rest in the shape of a human-headed bull from Khafajeh.



Figure 3: Pouring vessel in the shape of a human-headed bull.

Recumbent human-headed bulls were manufactured not only in the Sumerian heartland, but also as far north as Tell Brak in the Upper Khabur area of modern northeastern Syria. A recumbent human-headed bull made from limestone, shell and bitumen was excavated at this site [figure 5]. It was found in a fill from an Akkadian building, but may date to an earlier period. Its pose is typical of the Sumerian iconography, but the style is uncharacteristic. According to Aruz and Wallenfels (2003:231) this is the start of a distinctive Syrian sculptural style which was less refined than that of Mesopotamia.



Figure 4: Lamp in the shape of a human-headed bull.



Figure 5: Recumbent human-headed Bull from Tell Brak.

Numerous examples of recumbent human-headed bulls survive from the Ur III Period. These figures are more reminiscent in style of the example in the Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. Many are from the reign of Gudea of Lagash and are now in the Louvre [figure 6]. These figures usually do not have horns of their own, but wear the horned headdresses usually worn by divine beings (Roaf 2004:91). Some have holes in their backs for a removable

offering bowl (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:440), and therefore have a clear ritual function. It is most likely that the offerings were made while a favour was asked of the gods, and because these beings were associated with protection, this favour would very likely have been the granting of protection.



Figure 6: Recumbent human-headed bull from Lagash.

### 3.1.2 *Foundation Pegs*

The building of temples and palaces involved intricate rituals. Foundation pegs, in the form of small copper figurines, were driven into the walls of the temples during their construction. They were used to symbolically secure the building to the ground. Foundation pegs were used from the Early Dynastic Period until as late as the second millennium BC. The foundation pegs were usually either inscribed or accompanied by a stone tablet, which makes the identification of the buildings and their builders possible.



Figure 7: Foundation peg in the shape of a bull.



Figure 8: Foundation peg with a bull surrounded by vegetation.

Most foundation pegs represent human figures or deities. Three copper foundation pegs dating to the Ur III Period represent recumbent bulls. They were found at Telloh, the capital of the state of Lagash in modern southern Iraq during the Second Dynasty of Lagash. One was dedicated by Shulgi to the goddess Nanshe, while the remaining two record the rebuilding of the E-anna temple of Inanna by Gudea [figure 7] (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:442). A unique foundation peg from the reign of Gudea, now in the British Museum, is a cast copper figure of a bull surrounded by reeds or palm fronds [figure 8]. There is a cuneiform inscription on the peg which recounts the rebuilding of the temple of Nanshe by Gudea. The bulls surmounting these foundation pegs were meant to give the temples with which they were associated strength and protection.

### 3.1.3 *Plaques and Figurines*

Baked clay plaques were very popular in Mesopotamia. They have been discovered in houses, graves and temples. Mass produced in open-moulds, they were probably sold in the vicinity of temples, had some magical or religious significance (Oates 2003:59), and represent the popular religion of Mesopotamia. They functioned as votive and apotropaic objects. The plaques were placed within buildings to protect the buildings and their inhabitants from evil (Black & Green 1992:49).



Figure 9: Baked clay plaque with two bull-men.

Contest scenes<sup>4</sup> were a popular subject for the plaques. As with the contest scenes on cylinder seals, these included depictions of the bull-man. Bull-men were also depicted singly or in pairs,

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<sup>4</sup>Discussed in *Chapter 3: Contest Scenes*.

sometimes with the sun disc of Shamash [figure9]. That they were represented on the plaques demonstrates their importance as an apotropaic figure to the common people of Mesopotamia.

#### 3.1.4 *The Temple of Inshushinak*

Shilhak-Inshushinak, king of Elam during the second half of the twelfth century, built the temple in Susa dedicated to Inshushinak, the city's patron deity. The facade of this temple was made of moulded bricks and depicted bull-men and intercession goddesses called *lamas* [figure 10]. In Mesopotamia bull-men were associated with the Sun God Shamash. Inshushinak is often invoked with the Elamite Sun God in legal documents from Susa (Leick 1998:94). This suggests a similar association between Inshushinak and bull-men to that between Shamash and the bull-men, and their appearance on the facade of his temple wall is therefore fitting. That the bull-men served a beneficent and protective function is made clear by their accompaniment by the *lamas*.



Figure 10: The facade of the Temple to Inshushinak at Susa.

## 3.2 Assyria

### 3.2.1 *Gateway Guardians*

The colossal human-headed bulls of Assyrian architecture probably developed from the recumbent human-headed bulls of the Early Dynastic Period (Roaf 2004:87). The use of monumental sculptures of human-headed bulls as well as lions was common during the Neo-Assyrian Period when they were erected before the entrances to cities and palaces. They were meant to guard these gateways and to strike fear into approaching enemies. They were a mixture of sculpture in the round and relief sculpture. The legs could not be carved free because they

would not be able to support the weight of the sculpture, so, during the ninth and eighth centuries, five legs were carved so that when viewed from the side the sculpture had four legs, while it had two legs when viewed from the front [figure 11]. From the reign of Sennacherib, only four legs were depicted, with the extra front leg, when viewed from the side, being removed (Collon 1995b:139).



Figure 11: *Lamassu* figure from the palace of Sargon II at Khorsabad showing the fifth leg when viewed from the side.

The first use of the human-headed bull as a gateway guardian is attested at Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Nimrud [figure 18] (Strawn 2005:221). They continued to decorate the palaces and temples of the most important Assyrian kings until Esarhaddon, and their size increased throughout the period. Under Ashurnasirpal II they were about 3.3 metres high, but by the time of Sargon, they were over 4.4 metres. During Esarhaddon's reign, they reached heights of about 5.7 metres, and were so large that they had to be made of several blocks of stone fitted together (Collon 1995b:137). That there are no human-headed bulls or lions guarding doorways in Ashurbanipal's palace at Nineveh may be due to a lack of usable stone at that time (Black & Green 1992:51).

The doorways of Sennacherib's Palace Without Rival at Nineveh rested on cast bronze figures of bulls and lions (Bienkowski & Millard 2000:261). These bulls and lions would have fulfilled the same function as the human-headed bulls and lions which guarded the doors and gateways of the palaces of the other Assyrian kings. *Cylinder A* of the *Esarhaddon Inscriptions* records

the erection of a pair of human-headed bulls and reveals the function of the gateway guardians;

“Bull-divinities and colossi of stone  
which, according to their position,  
turn the breast of the enemy,  
which protect the path, render inviolable  
the way of the king, their builder,  
to the right and left I caused them to take  
their positions”

(Harper 1888:115).

On the same cylinder,

“Within this palace, may the  
gracious bull-divinities and gracious colossi,  
protecting the footsteps of my majesty,  
causing my spirit to rejoice...”

(Harper 1888:117).

These extracts clearly reveal that the purpose of the gateway guardian figures was one of protection. They were placed at the entrances of palaces, temples and cities to strike fear into the hearts of the ruler’s enemies, and to thereby protect the ruler, his city, and, by extension, his entire realm.

### 3.2.2 *Palace Reliefs*

While the doorways of the Assyrian palaces were flanked by guardian figures, the walls were decorated with relief sculpture. These depicted exploits of which the king was particularly proud, as well as apotropaic figures. A relief from the north wall of the Courtyard of Honour in Sargon II’s palace at Khorsabad which is now in the Louvre depicts a scene on water [figure 12].



Figure 12: Relief from Sargon II's palace at Khorsabad.

It is the only extant relief from the palace which does not depict a procession of courtiers and vassals. It most likely represents a military expedition to obtain wood to build the Assyrian palaces (Demange *et al* 1995:78), but may also depict the Assyrian army crossing the Mediterranean Sea to Cyprus (Ascalone 2005:236). Such an expedition is recorded in the *Annals of Sargon II*, the king under whom Khorsabad was the capital. The waters in the relief are populated by apotropaic figures, including a human-headed winged bull [figure 13] and a winged bull [figure 14], which were meant to guarantee the success of the expedition.



Figure 13: Detail of Figure 12.



Figure 14: Detail of Figure 12.

Reliefs from Ashurnasirpal II's palace at Nimrud depict protective demons. These apotropaic creatures generally have bodies of humans. Most have wings, and some have the heads of an eagle or a lion. Most of these protective demons carry two or three daggers. A protective demon with an eagle's head on a relief in the Vorderasiatisches Museum [figure 15], a winged genie on a relief in the British Museum, and another on a relief in the Louvre, carry daggers with bull's head pommels [figure 16]. These pommels would have bestowed the power and ferocity of the bull to the daggers and to those which wielded them.



Figure 15: Eagle-headed figure from Ashurnasirpal's palace at Nimrud.



Figure 16: Detail of Figure 15.

Some of these protective demons also wear bracelets on their upper arms with bulls' heads terminals. These bracelets would have had amuletic properties and functions, protecting the wearer from danger. A cast bronze bracelet with terminals in the form of calves' heads from Arslan Tash survives and is on display in the Louvre in Paris [figure 17]. This bracelet is too big and clumsy to have been worn and must have served some ritual or symbolic purpose. While the dagger pommels and bracelets were protective in and of themselves, the fact that they are associated with apotropaic figures in the reliefs compounds this protection.



Figure 17: Bracelet with calf-head terminals from Arslan Tash.

### 3.2.3 *The Source of Power of the Assyrian Bull and Composite Bull Figures as Protective Figures*

According to the standard inscription which was incised on the reliefs of Ashurnasirpal II's palace, the beings which guarded the gates originated in distant parts of the empire. In the text Ashurnasirpal states that they were "creatures of the mountains and the seas, which I fashioned out of white limestone and alabaster, [which] I had set up in its gates" (Paley 1977:535).

According to Annus (2002:117), the gateway guardian figures can be identified with the *kusarikku*<sup>5</sup> which was defeated by the god Ninurta, and that they symbolically represent all the enemies vanquished by this god and by the king. In their defeat they are bound in service as guardians of the gateways. Annus supports his hypothesis by citing the depiction of the human-headed winged bull in the sea in the relief sculpture from Sargon's Courtyard of Honour at Khorsabad [figure 13], and by a pair of winged human-headed bulls from facade D/E, the main entrance, of the throne room of Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace<sup>6</sup> [figure 18]. These winged human-headed bulls have "fish scales on the lower abdomen, continuing to the breast," and "the head and ears also give an impression of a fish". The head of each human-headed winged bull does not only appear like a fish, but the headdress is in actuality shaped like a fish, and is described by Russell (1998:706) as a "fish-head crown". The headdress is similar to those worn

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<sup>5</sup>The Akkadian *kusarikku* translates literally as "bison", and is usually believed to represent the bull-man. However, according to Black and Green (1992:51), "it is possible, but not certain, that the bull with human head was, like the bull-man, known in Akkadian as *kusarikku*," and Green (1995:1848) further states that it is the wingless form of the human-headed bull which may sometimes be a form of the *kusarikku*.

<sup>6</sup>For a full description of and discussion on the sculptures of Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Nimrud, see Russell 1998.

by the fish-garbed *apkallu* sages<sup>7</sup>. Above the human face, a fish-head, which looks upwards, is drawn over the scalp. Stripes on the fish's stomach turn up towards its face, and when viewed from the front form the horns of the standard *lamassu* headdress. While the ears of most *lamassu* figures were sculpted in the round, the ears of these figures are carved in relief, and represent bovine ears which merge with the headdress to resemble the pectoral fins of the fish. The fish scales on the abdomen of the human-headed bull described by Annus resemble in form the fish-skin cloak which hangs down the back of the fish-garbed *apkallu* figures.



Figure 18: Facade D/E of Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Nimrud.

Examples of fish-garbed *apkallu* sages are found in relief sculpture flanking doorways of the temple of Ninurta at Nimrud which was erected by Ashurnasirpal II<sup>8</sup>, and demonstrate that the figures had a protective function. It seems reasonable then to suggest that these fish-garbed human-headed winged bulls represent a merging of the *lamassu* and the fish-garbed *apkallu*. They are only found flanking the doorways to Ashurnasirpal's throne room, the room which the

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<sup>7</sup>These fish-garbed figures are generally thought to represent the *apakulla*, an apotropaic genie. Kawami (1974:9) notes that it is possible that they portray exorcists or priests in ritual dress which was modelled on that of the *apkallu*. While this may be true for the clay figurines of fish-garbed figures, *apkallu* were found in relief sculpture flanking doorways in Room C of the temple of Ninurta at Nimrud (Ornan 2004:83), and it seems improbable that the figures in this setting would have depicted mortals, because mortals would not have had the power to protect the building.

<sup>8</sup>Interestingly, however, if the reconstruction proposed by Russell (1998) is accurate, no fish-garbed *apkallu* figures decorated Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace.

king would want to protect the most, and because both the *lamassu* and the *apkallu* are apotropaic beings, the protective powers of these figures could be considered to be greater than either being would be on its own. This interpretation can be supported by two pairs of winged lion-centaurs which flank the same doorways. These creatures are a combination of the lion-centaur and the human-headed winged lion, which both had protective functions.

A further problem with Annus' hypothesis is that only the *lamassu* figures from facade D/E of the Ashurnasirpal II's throneroom display the fish-like qualities, so his theory can not apply to all of the gateway guardian figures. Ashurnasirpal II was the first ruler to flank his gateways and doorways with *lamassu* figures, and the fact that many of the figures from his Northwest Palace have features which are not common to later examples could be due to the fact that the conventions for their depictions as gateway guardians had not yet been set.

As Russell (1987:520) points out, the gateway guardians "represented extraordinary power, and this power lay mainly not in their mythical fusion of man and beast, but rather in their great size." The colossal statues were manufactured from stones brought from distant parts of the empire, and demonstrated the extent of the king's power, both in the area he controlled, and in the human resources needed to produce the sculptures.

### **3.3 Persia**

Bulls and human-headed bulls flanked the gateways of the capital cities of Persia, Persepolis, Pasargadae, Ecbatana and Susa. The outer entrance of the pillared gatehouse at Pasargadae was flanked by two bulls, while the inner entrance was guarded by two human-headed bulls. The entrance gateway to the citadel at Persepolis was called the Gate of All Nations because all people had to pass through it to pay homage to the Persian king. This gatehouse was similar to the one at Pasargadae, its outer entrance being guarded by bulls [figure 19] and its inner entrance by human-headed bulls (Frankfort 1996:353). Two bull sculptures also guarded the northern portico of the Hundred-Columns Throne Hall. The head of one of this pair of guardian bulls is now on display at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago [figure 20] The heads of the bulls were sculpted in the round and projected forward, while the bodies were carved in relief on the walls. The ears and horns had to be added separately. These gateway guardian figures

were carved with only four legs, following the convention of the later Assyrian models (Collon 1995b:139).



Figure 19: Bull gateway guardians of the Gate of All Nations at Persepolis.



Figure 20: Head of one of the bull gateway Guardians from the Hundred-Columns Throne Hall at Persepolis.

Columned halls, such as the Throne Room at Persepolis, were characteristic of Persian architecture. The columns were often surmounted by capitals consisting of the foreparts of two creatures placed together. Bulls were the most common of these creatures. Arguably the most famous example of a bull-headed capital comes from Susa and is currently housed in the Louvre [figure 21]. Columns from the Tripylon of Persepolis had capitals in the shape of human-headed bulls (Frankfort 1996:326). Griffin and lion capitals were also produced (Roaf 2004:219). These animals all served as apotropaic creatures, and so it seems likely that the column capitals fulfilled such a function. At heights of up to twenty metres, they had a perfect vantage point from which to watch over the king and his palace and city.



Figure 21: Bull head capital from Susa.

Reclining human-headed bulls were produced during the second half of the third millennium over a vast territory, from the Sumerian heartland in the south, to sites such as Tell Brak in the far north. The Ur III Period examples demonstrate that they were used in the cult, and the Early Dynastic pouring vessel and lamp would most likely have fulfilled a similar ritual purpose.

Although the Assyrian gateway guardians are the most famous of composite bull figures to act as protectors of buildings, they are not the earliest. Foundation pegs from the Ur III Period were surmounted by bulls, lending the foundations of the temples within which they were buried the strength of these bulls. The first monumental use was at the Temple of Inshushinak in Susa where bull-men and *lamas* decorated the walls. During the Persian Period not only *lamassu* but also bulls acted as gateway guardians.

The gateway guardians became bigger and more imposing over time, and acted as public protectors of the king, his city and his empire. The baked clay plaques reveal that bull composite figures, in the form of bull-men, gave personal protection to the common man. The bull and composite bull creatures as guardian figures were therefore not the reserve of the elite.

#### 4. AREAS OUTSIDE MESOPOTAMIA

##### 4.1 Reclining Androcephalous Bulls

Outside Mesopotamia, except for the use of bull's head amulets, the use of the bull and bull composite creatures for protection was restricted mainly to the Levant, with some rare examples from Anatolia. The earliest example of such a protective figure is a gold, wood and stone figure of a reclining human-headed bull which was found in Palace G at Ebla [figure 22]. It is stylistically similar to the carving of the human-headed bull on the vessel in the British Museum, which suggests it was of the same tradition. Roaf (2004:87) suggests that the work from Ebla was imported from Sumer or that it was produced locally in a Sumerian style. It is only four centimetres in height, and because of its small size, it may have functioned as an amulet (Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:173).



Figure 22: Recumbent human-headed bull from Ebla.

## 4.2 Gateway Guardians

Sculptures of bulls and human-headed bulls acted as guardians to gateways not only in Mesopotamia, but also in Anatolia and the Levant. Guardian animals, particularly lions and sphinxes<sup>9</sup> but also bulls, were erected at Bronze Age cities such as Hazor and Gezer as early as the middle of the second millennium. According to Caubet (1995:2673) the Assyrians probably took the concept of the protective creatures from these Levantine cities and their ideology. Human-headed bulls are first attested in Mesopotamia during the Early Dynastic Period, a millennium earlier than the examples from the Levant. The earliest known Mesopotamian gateway guardians, however, are from the time of Ashurnasirpal II in the ninth century. The Assyrians may have been influenced in their thoughts and art by the peoples which they conquered, and may have taken the tradition of gateway guardians from the Levant, but the concept of the bull and human and bull composite figures as apotropaic figures had a long history in their native land.

The use of the apotropaic figures was adopted by the Hittite Empire, and they became a feature of fortified Neo-Hittite and Aramaean cities of North Syria. Free standing bull figures guarded the gateways of the Iron Age palace at Tell Halaf. The surrounding wall of the citadel at Zincirli had a single gate which was decorated with sculpted orthostats which depicted protective lions and bulls [figure 23].

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<sup>9</sup>The lion and sphinx gateway guardians far outnumber the bull gateway guardians in Anatolia and the Levant, but these will not be discussed.



Figure 23: Bull relief from the gate at Zincirli.



Figure 24: Bull gateway guardian Arlsan Tash.

Two basalt bull statues flanked the entrance to the temple area at Arslan Tash in Northern Syria<sup>10</sup> [figure 24]. Lions decorated the east gate, west gate, and the Assyrian temple of the settlement (Albenda 1988:23). The bulls can be dated to the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III in the eighth century by an inscription which is carved across the body of one of the bulls. The bull with the inscription was called “Hurricane [...] who [...] the evil, who slays the enemies of the king” (Demange *et al* 1995:84). These bulls therefore fulfilled the same function as the more famous human-headed bulls of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. Albenda (1988:26) suggests that the temple complex was dedicated to Adad, and that the bull was used to flank the entrance to the temple area because it was the animal associated with the Storm god. This does not explain why the lion was chosen to flank the temple itself.

### 4.3 Cherubim

Statues of cherubim have not survived to the present day, but biblical references inform us that they were of a similar tradition to the Assyrian *lamassu* in both appearance and function. In fact, the cherubim were already identified with the Assyrian human-headed bulls and human-headed lions, which acted as gateway guardians, and the men and eagle-headed men with wings who had a fir-cone in one hand and a basket in the other, which were found in relief sculpture, as early as the nineteenth century (Ravenshaw 1856:94). This identification was derived from the description of the cherubim in the book of Ezekiel. In Ezekiel’s first description of the

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<sup>10</sup>Alternatively, Bienkowski and Millard (2000:31) claim they decorated the entrance of the Temple of Ishtar.

cherubim<sup>11</sup> in Ezekiel 1:10, he writes that “Their faces were like this: all four had the face of a man and the face of a lion on the right, on the left the face of an ox and the face of an eagle.” In Ezekiel 10:14, when he describes the cherubim, Ezekiel writes, “Each had four faces: the first was that of a cherub, the second that of a man, the third that of a lion, and the fourth that of an eagle.”<sup>12</sup> Because the cherub in Ezekiel 10:14 takes the place of the bull, or ox, in Ezekiel 1:10, the face of a cherub is therefore specifically equated with the face of an ox, and, as Faber (1816:422) points out, “the whole Cherub must have *especially* resembled an ox.” Ravenshaw (1856:99) believes the word ‘cherubim’ to mean ‘ox-headed’<sup>13</sup>.

The identification of the cherubim with the human-headed bulls apparently arose from the similarity in their function. In Genesis 3:24 God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden of Eden, “and to the east of the garden of Eden he stationed the cherubim and a sword whirling and flashing to guard the way to the tree of life.” The cherubim therefore guarded the entrance of the garden, fulfilling a similar function to the Assyrian human-headed bulls. Furthermore, according to Exodus 25:18, two small beaten gold figures of cherubim were placed on the Ark of the Covenant, and, according to 1 Kings 8:7, two larger olive-wood cherubim were set up in the inner sanctum of the Temple of Solomon where the Ark was placed. As noted by Foote (1904:280), “in these passages the cherubim act as ‘coverers,’ or protectors, and closely allied to this is the idea of ‘keepers’” which is attested to in Genesis 3:24.

Many scholars, however, find difficulties with the equation of the cherubim with the Assyrian gateway guardians. Ravenshaw (1856:99) quotes 1 Kings 7:29, which states that on the borders of the molten sea there were “lions, oxen and cherubim,” which proves that the cherubim and bull are distinct from each other and can not have been equated with each other. Ezekiel 1:7-8 states that “their legs were straight, and their hooves were like the hooves of a calf, glittering like a disc of bronze. Under the wings on each of the four sides were human hands; all four creatures

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<sup>11</sup>In the Good News Bible cherubim are called “Living Creatures” or “Winged Creatures”.

<sup>12</sup>The King James Bible agrees with this reading, but the Good News Bible renders the passage as, “Each creature had four faces, the first was the face of a bull...”

<sup>13</sup>Monck Mason (1818:95) goes further, stating that both the words ‘cherub’ and ‘seraph’ are “directly or in their roots” associated with the bull. He derives ‘Seraph’ from ‘Ser-Apis’, and believes this to be proof that the Seraphim were related to the Egyptian bull god Apis.

had wings and faces, and their wings touched one another.” The cherubim must therefore have been composite bull creatures. The fact that the cherubim are described as having human arms means that they cannot be equated with the standard Assyrian human-headed bull gateway guardians. While the existing examples of such sculptures do not have arms, it is possible that some did exist. The centaur is known from seals and *kudurrus* from the Kassite and Middle Assyrian periods, and the lion-centaur, a hybrid creature with the lower body and four legs of a lion, and the upper body and arms of a human, is found in the art of the Middle Assyrian and Neo-Assyrian periods. Two pairs of gateway guardian figures from facade D/E of Ashurnasirpal II’s Northwest Palace in Nimrud are depicted as lion-centaurs with wings [figure 18]. Additionally, an example of a figure of a winged human-headed bull with arms held in front of its chest exists as a bronze throne fitting from Toprakkale in Urartu [figure 25]. It is possible, therefore, that there were examples of winged human-headed bulls which had arms, but that none have survived. Whether or not they existed in Assyria, the Biblical cherubim appear to have been depicted as composite bull figures with arms.



Figure 25: Human-headed bull throne fitting from Toprakkale.

Bulls and bull composite beings were not used for protection as much in other areas of the ancient Near East as they were in Mesopotamia. Outside Mesopotamia, they are found predominantly in the Levant, but examples from Anatolia are also known. The examples from Anatolia are from Syro-Hittite city-states, and can therefore probably claim influence from the Levant. Bulls were far more popular than composite bull creatures as protective beings. The recumbent human-headed bull from Ebla reveals a shared tradition with the Sumerian city-states.

Similarly, even though the cherubim do not represent Assyrian *lamassu*, they are clearly of the same tradition of guardian bull composite figures.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The bull and composite bull figures clearly functioned as apotropaic figures in the ancient Near East, particularly in Mesopotamia. The use of the bull as a protective being can first be seen in the bull's head amulets which were worn across the ancient Near East from prehistoric Neolithic times.

In Mesopotamia composite bull creatures appear to have been more popular than bulls as apotropaic figures. Foundation pegs in the form of bulls have been discovered, but these are very rare and date exclusively to the Neo-Sumerian Period, a period which lasted a little over a century. It was not exclusively bulls which functioned as protective figures during this period. Statuettes of *lamassu*, androcephalous bulls, were produced during the third and second millennia. Some, such as those from the reign of Gudea of Lagash, had holes for removable offering bowls. They served in the cult, most likely for offerings in which protection was beseeched from the gods. It would appear then that *lamassu* were used in cult activities, while bulls were associated with the protection of buildings during the late third millennium.

The most famous use of the bull and composite bull creatures as protective figures is their use as gateway guardians. The bull-man adorned the walls of the Temple of Inshushinak in Susa, where his association with the protective *lama* goddess points to his purpose as an apotropaic figure. This was the first use on a monumental scale of a bull or composite bull figure being used to protect a building. The use of the human-headed bull as a gateway guardian is a much more famous and spectacular example. The earliest such creatures are found flanking the doorways of Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Nimrud. They guarded the entrances of palaces, temples and cities for the next two centuries, until the reign of Esarhaddon. According to the inscription from Esarhaddon's *Cylinder A* of the *Esarhaddon Inscriptions*, the human-headed bulls were meant to strike fear into the hearts of the king's enemies and to protect the king. This was achieved by the imposing size of the gateway guardians, as well as by the power and strength

associated with them through their bovine characteristics.

Human-headed bulls were also used by the Persians to flank the entrances of important buildings. Unlike the Assyrians, bulls also served as protective gateway guardians in the cities of the Persian empire. Bull and human-headed bull capitals also surmounted columns in the columned halls such as the Throne Room and Tripylon at Persepolis. From their vantage point of heights up to 20 metres above the ground, these figures could protect the Persian emperor and his empire.

Lions and sphinxes were more popular as protective beings for entrances to buildings and cities in the Levant and Anatolia. Two basalt bull statues guarded the entrance of the temple area at Arslan Tash, but no composite bull figures are known, except the cherubim from Israelite literature. According to book of Ezekiel, the cherubim were composite beings which had at least some features of the bull. According to the book of Genesis, these beings guarded the entrance to the garden of Eden, thus fulfilling a similar protective function to the Mesopotamian gateway guardians. The cherubim are therefore a verbal expression of the visual iconography.

Although bulls as apotropaic figures are known, it was predominantly composite figures with bovine features which fulfilled this function. Additionally, in the early periods, these protective creatures were depicted in the minor arts, but in later periods their portrayals had become monumental. This is connected to the development of their use for personal to public protection; first as amulets for commoners as well as the elite, to the later colossal statues which guarded the portals to the palaces and cities of the kings, and therefore to the empires themselves.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### 1. SUMMARY

The aim of this dissertation was to discuss how the motif of the bull was manifested in the art of the ancient Near East. The bull was a powerful symbol of power, strength, and virility to the peoples of the ancient Near East. This was represented in a variety of different iconographic motifs.

The use of bucrania in buildings and burials reveals an intimate relationship between the bull and the peoples of the Prehistoric ancient Near East. Bucrania have been found in sites from Egypt, Anatolia and the Levant, but not from Mesopotamia, although iconographic sources demonstrate that they were used to decorate buildings in Elam. Bucrania from Cyprus were used as masks in religious rituals. Most bucrania are from a prehistoric context, although there are examples from burials and depictions of their use in religious buildings which date to as late as the first millennium. Bucrania were generally used during the earlier periods to decorate private homes and burials, while in later periods they decorated public buildings.

Decorative bulls' heads have been found in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant, but purely decorative, non-functional examples do not survive from Egypt. The bull's head was first used as a decorative motif in Mesopotamia, and its use spread to Anatolia and the Levant. Most of these bulls' heads date to the third millennium. Some examples exist from the first millennium, but there does not appear to be any continuity between these and those from the third millennium. Decorative bulls' heads are usually found in a religious or ritual context, decorating furniture or cauldrons related to the temple, and in musical instruments found in a mortuary context.

The contest scene was one of the most popular subjects depicted on cylinder seals. Both animal and mythological contest scenes were produced, and these were not mutually exclusive in ideology. Bulls as well as composite bull creatures, such as the bull-man, acted as participants. Contest scenes originally decorated objects of a personal nature, such as cylinder seals and plaques, but by the Persian Period the contest scene in the form of the lion attacking the bull came to decorate public buildings at Persepolis. These Persian contest scenes functioned as an

expression of royal power. In general though, contest scenes symbolised the battle against the forces of chaos. The bull originally symbolised settled, civilised urban life, and represented something which was worth protecting and fighting for. The symbolism of the bull in the contest scene is therefore unique, because it is not the strength of the bull which is being represented. The reason for this is that the bulls in these early contest represent domesticated cattle. The bull-man, in contrast, was a combination of the wild bull and a man.

The bull was a potent symbol of power and strength, and the king wished to associate himself with these characteristics. The Egyptian pharaoh depicted himself as a bull in Predynastic and Early Dynastic iconography. During the Dynastic Period, the pharaoh's association with the bull was represented in more subtle ways. The king wore a bull's tail hanging from the back of his *schendyt* in depictions, and many pharaohs had an epithet like 'Mighty Bull' in their Horus name. In Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant the ruler was associated with the bull in texts, but not in iconography.

The king also associated himself with the strength of the bull by depicting himself as vanquishing the bull in a royal bull hunt. The bull hunt evolved from an activity necessary for survival to a ritual expression of royal power. This evolution is reflected in the depictions moving from being of a personal nature, such as on cylinder seals and ivory labels, to a more public nature, such as the Assyrian palace reliefs. The bull was a symbol of strength and ferocity, and the king's ability to overcome the bull added to his power and majesty. Although the king would have had assistants, these are usually not shown in artistic representations. Depictions of the bull hunt are known from Egypt, Mesopotamia and the Levant, but not from Anatolia, perhaps because the head of the Hittite pantheon, Teshub, was represented as a bull.

The horned headdress was used as a mark of divinity throughout the ancient Near East, except in Egypt where each deity had their own headdress. Its earliest known use is during Uruk Period in Mesopotamia. Its use spread to Anatolia and the Levant. The horned headdress had a number of different appearances, and sometimes a more elaborate headdress could denote a more important deity. The horned headdress symbolised the power, authority, and, to a lesser extent, the fertility or virility of the bull and the gods. In this regard, while Mesopotamian goddesses

as well as gods wore the horned headdress, in Anatolia and the Levant it was generally only goddesses with martial powers who wore the horned headdress.

Many gods are associated with the bull in texts, but few are in iconography. In Egypt bulls were worshipped as the living embodiments of certain gods. The Storm God and the Moon God were the deities most commonly associated with the bull in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant. The Storm Gods were often amongst the most powerful gods of the ancient Near Eastern pantheons, and it was the power and the fertility of the bull with which they were associated. In Hittite Anatolia the Storm God Teshub was worshipped as a bull in art as late as the fourteenth century at Alaçahöyük. Later he was depicted with either his two bulls, Sheri and Hurri, or with one bull, which could represent a single deity called Būru. The bull was more commonly associated with gods. The association between the Moon God and the bull was due to the horns of the bull resembling the shape of the crescent moon.

Few goddesses were associated with cattle in art and iconography. Those which were identified with cows were generally goddesses associated with fertility or motherhood. In Egypt some goddesses, such as Hathor and Bat, were represented as cows. Less commonly some goddesses, such as Šaušga and Kubaba, were depicted with the bull as their mount. In Mesopotamia buildings associated with Inanna were associated with the temple herd, and the Temple of Ninhursag at Ubaid was decorated with bull imagery, although there is evidence that this may be connected to the Moon God.

Sacrifices were meant to provide deities with sustenance. Bull sacrifices appear to have been reserved for special occasions. Depictions of bull sacrifice are rare in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant, but are abundant in Egypt. Altars were sometimes in the shape of a bull or decorated with bull imagery.

Bull-leaping appears to have actually been practised in at least some areas of the ancient Near East. A variety of bull-leaps were depicted, but not all would have been possible to execute. The Egyptian and Levantine depictions, as well as those from Alalakh, are related to the more famous Minoan representations. Anatolia had a separate tradition of bull-leaping which texts tell us was

ritual in nature. No depictions of bull-leaping are known from Mesopotamia. Bull-leaping was an expression of power, because it showed man conquering a powerful beast. Bull-leaping survives to this day in the recortes of Spain.

Both bull and composite bull figures acted as apotropaic or protective figures across the ancient Near East, although lions and sphinxes more commonly fulfilled this role in areas outside Mesopotamia. Bull's head amulets afforded the wearer protection already during prehistoric times, while in later periods both bulls and composite bull figures guarded the gateways of palaces, temples and cities. This reflects a development of the use of the bull for personal protection to a public demonstration of its protective function. This protection was derived from the power and strength of the bull. Because the king commissioned gateway guardian bull and composite bull figures, they were in a sense an expression of his power.

## 2. CONCLUSIONS

The motif of the bull was manifested in a variety of ways. These motifs could be consistently depicted, or could be represented differently in the various areas of the ancient Near East, as well as during different periods.

In this dissertation the bull has been discussed according to its association with bucrania, decorative bulls' heads, contest scenes, the king, the royal bull hunt, horned headdresses of divinity, gods and goddesses, the practices of sacrifice and bull-leaping, and its ability to provide protection<sup>14</sup>. These different types of bull iconography have been divided into four sections, 'The Bull and Daily Life'. 'The Bull and Royal Ideology', 'The Bull and Divinities', and 'The Bull and Religious Practices'. Each type of bull icon can be ascribed to more than one of these. For example, while the bull hunt was an expression of royal power, libations were poured over the dead beasts, and thanks given to the gods. The royal bull hunt could therefore also be classified as a ritual.

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<sup>14</sup>Some of these motifs are found in areas outside the ancient Near Eastern heartland; representations of bull-leaping have been found in the Indus Valley and on the Greek mainland; and decorative bulls' heads have been found from Dilmun, modern day Bahrain. Although this study focusses on the motif of the bull in the ancient Near East, the use of bull iconography was not restricted to this area.

It appears that at least in some instances the bull was used for purely decorative purposes. There is no obvious function for some of the bulls' heads. However, the fact that the bull was depicted at all demonstrates that it was held in a certain regard or awe by the peoples of the ancient Near East. As explained in the introduction of this dissertation, cattle remains generally constitute a relatively small part of the faunal remains of sites. In comparison, sheep remains are amongst the most common. However, bulls are far more commonly depicted in iconography than sheep are. This inconsistency reveals that the bull was an important symbol to the peoples of the ancient Near East.

The various motifs of bull iconography are closely linked, and at times their meanings merge and overlap. The separate motifs did not stand in isolation. This is visually confirmed by the iconography of the Queen's Lyre from the Royal Burials at Ur. Not only does the decorative panel at the front of the lyre contain depictions of various types of contest scene, but the lyre itself has a bull's head protome. Each motif could mean more than one thing and can reveal more than one aspect of the importance of the bull.

## **2.1 Themes**

The bull was a potent symbol of strength, authority, and, to a lesser degree, of virility. In reference to this symbolism, bull iconography was used to express the power of man, particularly of the king, and was associated with religion and ritual.

### *2.1.1 The Strength and Power of the Bull*

The bull symbolised strength, power and, to a lesser degree, fertility or virility. When the pharaoh identified himself with a bull in Pre- and Early Dynastic depictions, this bull was depicted trampling on the enemies of the state. It was therefore the strength and martial power of the bull with which the king wished to identify himself.

The horned headdress of divinity was symbolic of the qualities of strength and power which was shared by the gods and the bull. In some periods, when a horned headdress had more horns, it denoted a more powerful god. Because the horns of these headdresses were associated with the bull, this suggests that the bull was the source of this power. In Anatolia and the Levant, the

goddesses which wore the horned headdress were predominantly goddesses associated with martial powers. This appears to be particularly true for the Canaanite goddess who wore the triple-horned headdress, because the statuette representing her which is now in the Louvre shows her brandishing two weapons, and with a blade at her belt<sup>15</sup>.

The gods which were identified with the bull were amongst the most powerful gods in their pantheons. The Storm God was the head of the pantheon in Hittite Anatolia, and, although not the head of the pantheon in Mesopotamia or the Levant, was one of the most powerful gods in these areas. The Storm God was also a god of fertility, and this characteristic is shared with the bull. In bull iconography, however, it is more commonly the strength of the bull which is symbolised.

Early bucrania were built into the walls of houses, and were meant to literally “hold the house together” and to offer it protection. Similarly, bulls and composite bull figures acted as gateway guardians in Assyria during the first millennium, offering the king, his city and his empire protection. The ability of the bull to provide protection reveals the strength and power associated with it.

The exception to the rule of the bull being a symbol of strength is the portrayal of the bull in contest scenes in which it was depicted as something which needed to be protected. This can be explained by the fact that the bull in these scenes represents a domestic bull, and not a wild bull. The bull-man, who was a composite bull figure, on the other hand, was represented as a powerful figure in contest scenes. It was the wild bull which the peoples of the ancient Near East held in such awe and esteem.

### 2.1.2 *The Bull as an Expression of Man’s Power*

Because the bull was associated with strength and power, when man was depicted in relation to the bull, he could be associated with these characteristics. Because the king was the most powerful mortal, this theme was usually employed in royal ideology. This association could be

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<sup>15</sup>This is the only representation of this goddess which depicts the goddess so armed, but it is one of only three known representations of her. Only the head of one of the other two statuettes survives. Therefore one must be cautious when drawing any conclusions.

achieved in a number of ways; the king could either be shown as a bull, and therefore be overtly identified with the power of the bull, or he could be shown triumphing over the bull, and he would therefore be understood to have greater power than the bull. The final way in which man could demonstrate his power in association to the bull was for the elite to possess objects with bull iconography.

The first way in which man could be associated with the power of the bull was to be identified as a bull. Only the king did this. In Egypt the pharaoh was explicitly depicted as a bull during the Predynastic and Early Dynastic periods, and was implicitly associated with the bull through the use of the bull's tail and various epithets during the remainder of the Dynastic Period. The pharaoh in these cases wished to associate himself with the power and strength of the bull. It was only the Egyptian pharaoh who was identified as a bull in art and iconography. The kings of Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant were associated or portrayed as bulls in texts, but this was not done consistently, as it was in Egypt. In both Egypt and Assyria, the king also got his power from suckling a goddesses in the form of a cow (in Egypt this goddess was Hathor, in Assyria it was Ishtar).

By the use of the motif of the bull hunt, kings demonstrated their own superior power by conquering the bull. The bull hunt depicted in Seti I's Corridor of the Bull may reflect ritual in which the king assimilated the strength of the bull. The relationship between the power of the king and the bull is also demonstrated in more subtle ways such as the use of the bull and composite bull figures as protective gateway guardians of palaces and cities. The fact that these beings served to protect the king implies that he had some control over them, and that he was therefore more powerful than them.

The display of the power of man over the bull is also demonstrated in the depictions of the bull-leap. Because the bull hunt is a far more potent expression of power over the bull, it appears that bull-leaping was actually practised in the ancient Near East. Depictions of bull-leaping are particularly associated with Minoan Crete, and are thought to be an expression of Knossian power. The bull-leap was therefore a symbol of power which was diffused across the ancient Near East.

In a less literal way, the connection between the bull and the king and the elite is demonstrated by the use of bucrania to mark the graves of the elite in Egypt and at Alaçahöyük in modern day Turkey. Similarly, at Ur bulls' heads were attached to objects found in the burials of the elite. There is evidence that these objects were used while the inhabitants of the tomb were still alive. These objects were therefore luxury objects and were representative of the wealth of the elite.

### 2.1.3 *The Bull as an Expression of Religious Power*

The bull was not only used in symbolism relating to royalty. Many motifs of bull iconography associate the bull with religion and ritual. The bull was associated with gods, while goddesses were more commonly associated with the cow. Religious practices associated with the bull reveal its importance to the cult and to the religions of the peoples of the ancient Near East in general.

The most important way in which the bull was associated with religion was in its identification and association with various gods. The Apis, Mnevis and Buchis bulls acted as the earthly manifestations of Ptah, Ra and Montu, some of the most powerful gods of the Egyptian pantheon. Across the ancient Near East, the Storm God was the god most commonly associated with the bull. At Alaçahöyük the Hittite Storm God Teshub was depicted as a god. In rare cases, such as in depictions of the bull from the Ishtar Gate from Babylon, the bull stood as an expression of the Storm God. It is important, however, to remember that this bull was not a manifestation of the Storm God. The bull itself was not a god.

The possible exceptions are the three Anatolian bulls, Sheri, Hurri and Būru. These bulls, however, can be classified as divine beings rather than as gods. In later Hittite iconography, Sheri and Hurri were associated Teshub and were depicted pulling his chariot. During the Syro-Hittite Period, the Storm God was depicted standing on a bull. This bull may represent a separate divine figure called Būru. These three Anatolian bulls are the only bulls associated with a god for whom we know the name, and who appear as separate divine beings.

The Moon God was also associated with the bull. This connection came about because the horns

of the bull were reminiscent of the crescent moon. A crescent shape is found on the foreheads of some bulls' heads and bull statuettes, perhaps identifying them with the herd of the Moon God, if not with this god himself. Where one bull acted as the mount for the Storm God, the Moon God was depicted standing on two crossed bulls. In some depictions, such as the stelae from Tell el-Ash'ari, Bethsaida and Gazian Tepe, the bull appears to be associated with both the Storm God and the Moon God simultaneously.

Few goddesses were associated with cattle. Where gods were associated with the bull, goddesses were more commonly associated with the cow. These goddesses were predominantly goddesses associated with fertility and motherhood. In Egypt Hathor and Bat were depicted in the form of a cow. Outside Egypt, goddesses such as Šuašga and Kubaba were depicted with a bull as their mount.

What is interesting to note is that the god El, who was consistently described as 'Father Bull' in Ugaritic texts, is never depicted as a bull. Similarly, the goddesses Anat and Ninsun are also associated with cows in texts, but nowhere are they depicted as cows in iconography.

The triangle decorating many representations of the bull reveals this animal's divine characteristics and nature. Although the bull is associated with divinity and with gods, this does not necessarily mean that there was a bull cult, in the sense that the bull itself was worshipped as a god, in the ancient Near East.

The bull was also involved in a number of religious practices and rituals. Almost all bull iconography had a ritual aspect to it.

The most obvious way in which the bull was associated with ritual was its use as an offering of sacrifice. Depictions of bull sacrifice are abundant from Egypt and depict every aspect of the practice, from catching the bull, to leading it in a procession to be sacrificed, to the act of sacrifice itself. Outside Egypt, depictions are rare. Only two known examples from Mesopotamia of the bull being slaughtered exist. More commonly, the bull was depicted being led towards sacrifice. A variation of this may be found in representations of the banquet scene, in which the

bull is shown being led by a man.

Also related to the motif of sacrifice is that some altars were decorated with bull iconography. These include the Canaanite horned altars, and the altar from Savcılı which was in the form of two bulls, probably representing Sheri and Hurri.

The bull hunt was a ritual which confirmed the king's right to rule. The religious aspect of it is revealed as early as the Uruk Period when a bull hunt in association with a temple was depicted on a cylinder seal. More obviously, Assyrian reliefs show the king pouring a libation to the gods over the bulls which he has killed.

The ritual aspect of bull-leaping is revealed on the relief vessel from Hüseyindede and in the Luwian inscription. An *ankh* found between the two leapers on the cylinder seal impression from Alalakh further demonstrates the ritual aspect of bull-leaping.

Bucrania were found in burials and decorated buildings of religious and cult significance. When associated with burials, they may be indicative of the slaughter of cattle for funerary or mortuary rites. Bucrania at Çatalhöyük also appear to be related to ritual activity. It is believed that at least some of the bucrania at the site acted as mnemonics of important events, creating ancestral ties between the living and the deceased. More obviously associated with the cult are the bucrania from Cyprus which were used as bull masks in rituals, although we do not know the exact nature of these rituals.

Decorative bulls' heads, such as that from Khafajeh, have been found in a religious context - in this case in the remains of a temple - and, although not cult objects themselves, they decorated objects associated with the temple. In the case of the bull's head from Telloh now in the Louvre, the bull's head is known to have decorated a musical instrument which was dedicated to a god, and it is possible that some of the bulls' heads for which we don't know the archaeological context may have functioned similarly. The bull's head from Altyn-Depe itself, and the Canaanite bulls' heads, may have been used as an object of worship.

Contest scenes are often found decorating objects of cultic significance, such as the vessels from the Uruk and Jemdet Nasr periods in Mesopotamia. Contest scenes also decorated relief plaques which were dedicated to the gods. Some types of contest scene may reflect religious ideology. An example of this is the Canaanite motif of the bull attacking the lion, which may represent Baal confronting the forces of chaos.

## **2.2 Regional Variation**

Different themes and different motifs appear to have been more important in different areas. These also took on different appearances in the different areas of the ancient Near East. Several motifs appear to have originated in Mesopotamia, from where they spread to Anatolia and the Levant. In each area, the use and appearance of each motif was adapted to the ideology of that region. Several motifs of bull iconography also appear unique to each region.

The earliest decorative bulls' heads are found in Mesopotamia and date to the third millennium. Examples of decorative bulls' heads dating to slightly later in the third millennium than the Mesopotamian examples have been found in Canaan, Dilmun and in Susa. The examples from outside Mesopotamia are not mere reproductions of the Mesopotamian bulls' heads, but reflect stylistic changes according to region.

The earliest use of the contest scene is also found in Mesopotamia and examples from Anatolia, the Levant and Egypt display variation. In Mesopotamia, both animal and mythological contest scenes were produced, while in Anatolia, the Levant and Egypt, animal contest scenes are more common. The most common type of animal contest scene was that in which the lion and bull were combatants. The contest scene was depicted in all periods of Mesopotamian history, and was the most popular motif for cylinder seals during the Akkadian Period. A variation of the motif of lion and bull combat which is unique to Mesopotamia is that of the Anzu bird and the bull, sometimes represented as a human-headed bull.

The use of the horned headdress to denote divinity finds its earliest manifestation on the Warka Vase of Mesopotamia during the Uruk Period. Numerous examples of its use exist from third millennium Mesopotamia, while in Anatolia and the Levant it is found in depictions of deities

from the second millennium onwards. Not only was there an evolution in the appearance of horned headdress in each separate area over time, but the representations from Anatolia and the Levant differed from the Mesopotamian examples. The horned headdresses worn by the Anatolian gods during the Hittite Empire Period are unique in appearance, while those dating from the Syro-Hittite Period show similarities with the Levantine horned headdresses. Another difference in the use of the horned headdress is that in Mesopotamia both gods and goddesses wore the headdress during all periods. In Anatolia during the Hittite Empire Period, its use was restricted to gods. During the Neo-Hittite Period, some goddesses also wore the horned headdress, but this was not consistent. In the Levant many more gods wear the horned headdress than do goddesses. The notable exception is the triple-horned headdress which is worn exclusively by a goddess. The differences in the rendering of the horned headdress do not mean that the horned headdresses had a different meaning in the various areas of the ancient Near East - the horned headdress was always used as a mark of divinity.

Similarly, in the use the bull and composite bull figures as protective beings is well known in Mesopotamia, but few are known from other areas. The human-headed bulls which guarded the doorways and gateways of Assyrian palaces and cities are potent symbols of the Assyrian Empire. The Biblical cherubim were also powerful composite bull creatures, but we only know of these figures from passages in the Bible, as no known examples exist in iconographic sources.

The bull-leaping motif is the only aspect of bull iconography discussed in this dissertation which is not found in Mesopotamia. The earliest evidence for bull-leaping is found on Canaanite seals, suggesting that the practice, or at least the depiction thereof, originated in the Levant. It is the only area in which two acrobats were shown simultaneously leaping over the bull. The depictions on wall paintings from Avaris in Egypt appear to be related to the more famous frescoes from Knossos in Crete.

The Levant appears to have used much of the same iconography as Mesopotamia. In many instances the objects manufactured, although reflecting the same ideology, were produced in a style unique to the area. For example, the recumbent human-headed bull from Tell Brak is believed to reflect the beginning of a distinctive Syrian sculptural style which was less refined

than that of Mesopotamia. The decorative bulls' heads from Canaan were similarly produced with a rougher appearance than the Mesopotamian bulls' heads.

Several motifs of bull iconography are unique to the Levant. A unique kind of horned headdress is the triple-horned headdress which was only worn by goddesses of the area. This headdress may be representative of a particular goddess, and would therefore have functioned like the headdresses of the Egyptian deities which were each unique to a specific deity.

A type of seal which was only produced in Canaan was one in which a bull was depicted overpowering a lion. This unusual design may represent a battle in which Baal, symbolised by the bull, overcomes the forces of chaos, symbolised by the lion. If this is the correct understanding of the motif, it represents a uniquely Canaanite symbolism adapted to the ideology of the area.

The most evidence regarding bull sacrifice comes from ancient Israel, although most evidence is textual. The only iconographic or archaeological evidence for bull sacrifice in the Levant is the horned altars. These altars are unique to the area, and it is possible that the horns of these altars are descendent from horns which were used to decorate earlier altars.

A series of Phoenician seals and a relief now housed in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptek in Copenhagen depict a god with the body of a man and the head of a bull. This god is thought to represent Baal. The Egyptian Apis and Buchis could be represented as bulls or in the form of a human with the head of a bull, but these depictions from the Levant are the only instance in which a god who was not usually associated with a bull in iconography was depicted in this manner.

Anatolia also had separate traditions for some of the motifs of bull iconography which were shared by all areas of the ancient Near East. The horned headdresses of divinity from thirteenth century Yazilikaya are unique in appearance. They are the most elaborate horned headdresses ever depicted, with a high conical shape and with multiple pairs of horns protruding outwards from the headdress as well as from the centre of the headdress.

The Anatolian Storm God is the only god who rode in a chariot drawn by bulls, and his bulls, whether Sheri and Hurri or Būru, are the only bulls associated with a god which were worshipped as separate divinities. This god is also the only non-Egyptian god to have been worshipped in the form of a bull. Bull hunts were not depicted in Hittite Anatolia, perhaps because of the identification of the bull with Teshub, the head of the pantheon.

The relief vase from Hüseyindede and the Luwian text reveal that bull-leaping in Anatolia had a more obvious ritual aspect than depictions known from elsewhere in the ancient Near East.

Certain aspects of bull iconography in Egypt followed different conventions to the rest of the ancient Near East. Known examples of decorative bulls' heads from Egypt were functional in and of themselves, and did not function as attachments as most examples from Mesopotamia, the Levant and Anatolia did<sup>16</sup>. Similarly, the horned headdress did not function as a mark of divinity in Egypt because each Egyptian deity had their own distinguishing headdress.

Egypt is the only area in which the king is depicted in iconography as a bull or with bull attributes. During the Predynastic Period the pharaoh depicted himself as a bull. During the Dynastic Period, this association was represented in more subtle ways. The king wore a bull's tail hanging from the back of his *schendyt* in depictions, and many pharaohs had an epithet like 'Mighty Bull' in their Horus name. There are textual examples of this association in Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant, but in these areas the ruler is not consistently represented as a bull.

It was only in Egypt that bulls were believed to be the earthly manifestation of specific gods. The Apis, Mnevis and Buchis bulls were earthly manifestations of Ptah, Ra and Montu respectively, and could be represented as bulls or as humans with the head of a bull. The goddesses Hathor and Bat were consistently represented as cows. Both goddesses are also known to have taken on the appearance of a human female, and depictions of Hathor with the body of a woman and the head of a cow are known. Several other goddesses, such as Isis, Hesat, Nut and Neith were also associated with cows. Few goddesses outside Egypt were associated with the cow or bull.

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<sup>16</sup>Although the Anatolian drinking vessels are an exception.

Another area in which Egypt differs from Mesopotamia, Anatolia and the Levant is in the visual representations of bull sacrifice. While depictions of bull sacrifice are rare in Mesopotamia and Anatolia, and no known examples exist from the Levant, they are abundant in Egypt. Every aspect of process of sacrifice is depicted, from catching the bull, to its slaughter. In contrast, there are few written sources in Egypt regarding bull sacrifice, while many are known from the other areas of the ancient Near East.

Motifs and themes of bull iconography therefore did not take on the exact same appearance across the ancient Near East, but were adapted to the ideology, as well as artistic style, of each area. Although the appearance of bull iconography was different in different areas, the meaning behind the visual representations is constant.

### **2.3 Chronological Developments**

There were chronological developments in the various motifs of bull iconography. Some motifs were more important during a certain period, or restricted to a specific period. Bull-leaping depictions date to the first half of the second millennium. Decorative bulls' heads, generally associated with the social elite and with the temple, were produced predominantly during the third millennium. Examples produced during the first millennium do not appear to be related to the earlier bulls' heads, but nevertheless functioned similarly.

Many of the motifs of bull iconography underwent some kind of evolution in their portrayal. The Egyptian pharaoh is depicted as a bull almost exclusively during the end of the Predynastic Period. During the Dynastic Period, the bull's tail worn by the pharaoh was used as a symbol of this association.

The use of bucrania in architecture and burials also changed over time. The earliest bucrania were buried within the walls of dwellings at sites like Çatalhöyük and Mureybet, and early Nubian burials were surmounted by one bucranium. By the First Dynasty in Egypt, hundreds of bucrania surrounded Tomb 3504 at Saqqara. Bucrania continued to decorate Elamite temples until at least the reign of Ashurbanipal of Assyria during the seventh century. What was therefore originally a personal and intimate relationship between Man and the Bull, over time

became a public expression of the elite.

Contest scenes also underwent a development in their portrayal. During the Uruk Period in Mesopotamia, contest scenes usually depicted a bull being attacked by a lion. The loss of livestock would have been a reality to the people who produced these depictions, and this is what was being represented. By the Early Dynastic Period, a human figure was shown defending the bull, reflecting an attempt by man to protect his property. This later developed into the mythical contest scene in which the nude hero and the bull-man participated. These depictions symbolised the general struggle of settled life against the forces of chaos. By the Persian Period, the lion attacking the bull depicted in reliefs from Persepolis to come express the might of the king and his empire. The development of the contest scene therefore reflects a change in the meaning of the motif. While in early periods the contest scene symbolised the struggles of daily life of the newly settled communities, but the later periods, depictions became an expression of royal power.

The appearance of the horned headdress changed over time, and, in some periods and places, a more elaborate headdress was indicative of a more powerful divinity. During the Early Dynastic Period in Mesopotamia, some examples of the horned headdress were surmounted with the head of a bull, explicitly demonstrating the link between the animal and the headdress. By the Akkadian Period, the bull disappeared and was replaced by tiers of horns. Originally these tiers faced outwards from the centre of the of the headdress, but by the Isin-Larsa Period several pairs of superimposed horns faced inwards on the headdress. With few exceptions, the appearance of the horned headdress in Mesopotamia remained the same until the Neo-Assyrian Period.

In the Levant and Anatolia the appearance of the horned headdress also underwent some changes. In the Levant at the start of the second millennium, the horned headdress was similar in appearance to the contemporary Mesopotamian horned headdress, and comprised of several superimposed pairs of horns which faced inwards towards the centre of the headdress. The convention quickly changed so that only one pair of horns was shown protruding forwards from the headdress. This headdress often had a knob at the top. The earliest known examples from Anatolia, dating to the seventeenth century, contain one pair of horns which protrude from the

headdress. By the thirteenth century at Yazilikaya, the gods wore high conical headdresses with multiple pairs of horns facing both inwards and outwards. These are the most elaborate headdresses which were ever produced. By the ninth century, the horned headdresses worn by the Syro-Hittite gods took on an appearance similar to those of the Levantine gods. The headdresses were conical, surmounted by a knob and with one to three pairs of horns protruding from the headdress. Although the horned headdress took on a number of appearances, its function and symbolism remained constant.

An evolution can also be seen in the representations of the bull hunt. The bull hunt began as a necessary practice to provide for and protect the earliest communities. As settled life became more secure, the bull hunt became reserved for the elite, and developed into a ritual demonstration of the king's power. This development is reflected in depictions of the bull hunt. In the earliest depictions, like that at Çatalhöyük, the entire community is shown involved in the hunt, but during the Uruk Period in Mesopotamia already, only the priest-king is shown combatting the bull. The gold dish from Ugarit and Ramses III's bull hunt relief from Medinet Habu further demonstrate the king's supreme authority and power by depicting him as riding a chariot by himself while attacking bulls. The representations of the bull hunt also developed from depictions on smaller works, like cylinder seals, to more monumental works, such as the Assyrian friezes. This reflects the development of depictions from being more personal to becoming public displays of the king's power. Depictions of the bull hunt were not produced during all periods, perhaps because other motifs of kingly power were more important at these times.

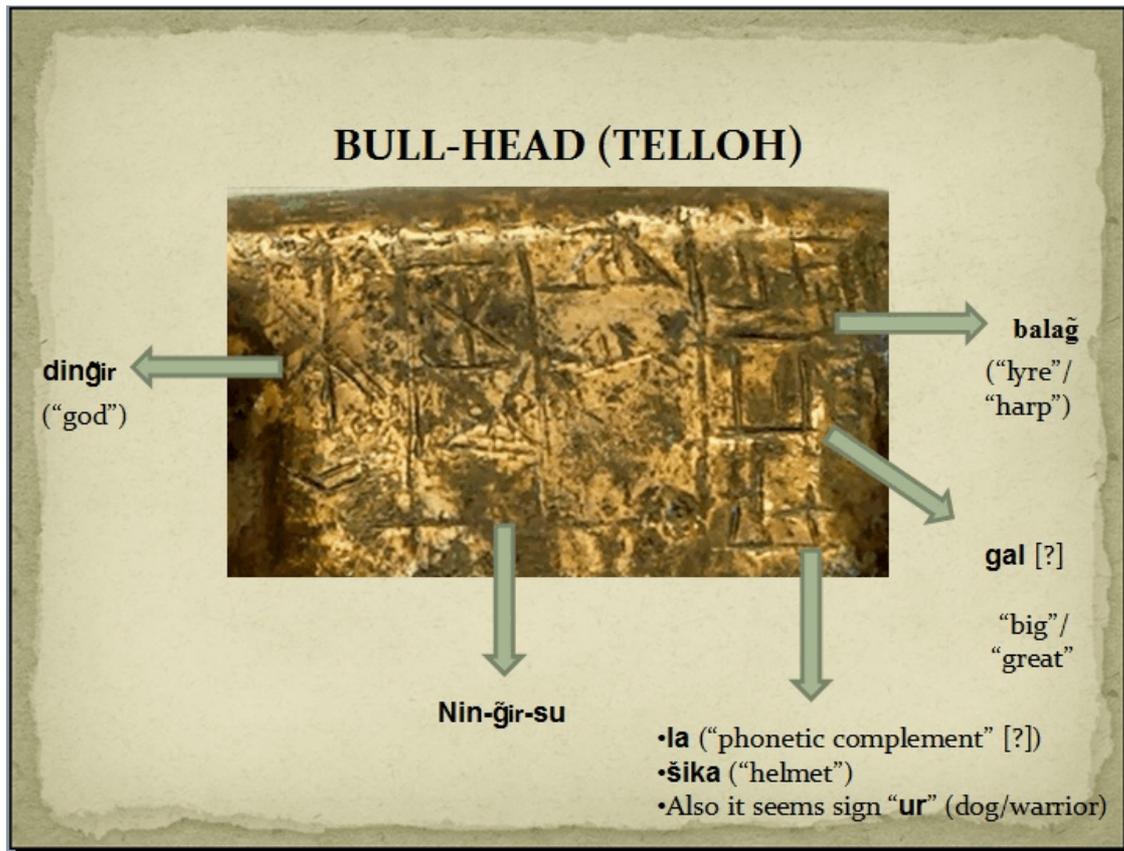
This development can also be traced in the use of bulls and composite bull creatures as protective beings. Bull's head amulets offered the individual protection already during the Neolithic Period. By the Neo-Sumerian Period in Mesopotamia, foundation pegs surmounted by bulls were used to offer strength, security and protection to public buildings, although they were smaller objects and remained hidden in the foundations of buildings. By the Assyrian Period, monumental figures of human-headed bulls guarded the doorways and gateways to palaces, temples and cities, and therefore represent a public display of the protection they afforded the king, his city and his empire.

The portrayals of various motifs of bull iconography were therefore not consistent, even within the same area. Although the basic symbolism stayed the same, its application underwent changes. In many instances the motif developed into one of national importance, and was symbolic of the power of elite. This is related to how bull iconography was associated the king and to the elite.

Bull iconography is abundant and permeates the ancient Near Eastern visual arts, and the ancient Near Eastern cultures. It touches every aspect of ancient Near Eastern life. Each motif of bull iconography has several meanings. The concept and symbolism of the bull in the iconography of the ancient Near East cannot be understood by studying any single aspect in isolation. All of its many manifestations must be taken into consideration. At the outset of this dissertation, I undertook to document and examine how the concept of the bull was expressed in ancient Near Eastern iconography. I believe that this study has achieved that.

## ADDENDUM 1: THE TRANSLATION OF THE INSCRIPTION ON THE DECORATIVE BULL'S HEAD FROM TELLOH AND NOW IN THE LOUVRE

Discussed in *Chapter 2: Decorative Bulls' Heads* under subheading 2.2.5 *Bulls' Heads of Unknown Provenance*.



Translation by Rodrigo Cabrera Pertusatti

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- Figure 20: Frieze from the Temple of Ninursag at Ubaid. British Museum website, available online at

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/search\\_object\\_image.aspx?currentpage=1&asset\\_id=250302&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx&partid=1&searchtext=ubaid+ninhursag&objectid=368451&numpages=10](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?currentpage=1&asset_id=250302&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&partid=1&searchtext=ubaid+ninhursag&objectid=368451&numpages=10)

Figure 21: Copper bull from the Temple of Ninhursag at Ubaid. British Museum website, available online at

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/search\\_object\\_image.aspx?objectId=371400&partId=1&searchText=ubaid+ninhursag&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset\\_id=15849](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?objectId=371400&partId=1&searchText=ubaid+ninhursag&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset_id=15849)

Figure 22: Foundation peg in the shape of a bull. Van Dijk, R.M., photograph taken at the Louvre, April 2010.

Figure 23: Foundation peg with a bull surrounded by vegetation. Van Dijk, R.M., photograph taken at the British Museum, May 2006.

Figure 24: Stele from Arslantepe depicting Kubaba on a bull. Hawkins 1981:170, figure 2(d).

## CHAPTER 9: BULL SACRIFICE

Figure 1: The altar from the Painted Temple at Uqair. Goff 1963:figure 295.

Figure 2: Sacrifice scene from the Stele of the Vultures. Van Dijk, R.M., photograph taken at the Louvre, April 2010.

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Figure 4: Early Dynastic sculptural group depicting a man presenting a bull for sacrifice. Van Dijk, R.M., photograph taken at the Louvre, April 2010.

Figure 5: Mural from Mari. Aruz, Benzel & Evans 2008:33, catalogue number 8.

Figure 6: Mural from Mari. Van Dijk, R.M., photograph taken at the Louvre, April 2010.

Figure 7: Relief from Ashurnasirpal II's palace. British Museum website, available online at

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/search\\_object\\_image.aspx?objectId=369057&partId=1&searchText=ashurnasirpal+](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?objectId=369057&partId=1&searchText=ashurnasirpal+)

II+bull+hunt&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch\_the\_collection\_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset\_id=372294

- Figure 8: Depiction of bull sacrifice. British Museum website, available online at [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/search\\_object\\_image.aspx?objectId=276396&partId=1&searchText=balawat+gate+tigris&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset\\_id=321063](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?objectId=276396&partId=1&searchText=balawat+gate+tigris&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset_id=321063) (detail).
- Figure 9: Votive plaque of Lumma. Ascalone 2005:203.
- Figure 10: Terracotta plaque showing the slaying of the Bull of Heaven. Van Dijk, R.M., photograph taken at the Vorderasiatische Museum, June 2007.
- Figure 11: Chalcedony cylinder seal impression. Aruz & Wallenfels 2003:483, figure 114.
- Figure 12: Seal of Qerub-dini-ili. Collon 2005: 180, catalogue number 858.
- Figure 13: Arslantepe relief. Bunnens 2006:166, figure 102.
- Figure 14: Seal depicting a goddess in front of an altar. Ward 1899:33, figure 47.
- Figure 15: Karatepe relief. Bilgin, T., photograph taken in 2009, available online at <http://www.hittitemonuments.com/karatepe/karatepe42.jpg>
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- Figure 17: Horned altar from Beersheba. Scheffler 2000:99.
- Figure 18: Wall painting depicting a calf being lead for sacrifice from Tomb 226 of Western Thebes. Aldred 1987:59, figure 31.
- Figure 19: Scene depicting the slaughter of a bull from the tomb of Idout. Strudwick 2006:400-1.
- Figure 20: Beni-Hasan wooden model. Garstang 1903:Plate G (detail)
- Figure 21: Sacrificial bull's head from Illahun. Burleigh & Clutton-Brock 1980:Plate XXI
- Figure 22: Offering table of Nakht. Fassone & Ferraris 2007:261.
- Figure 23: Soul house with the leg and head of a bull. Van Dijk, R.M., photograph taken at the Louvre, April 2010.

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- Figure 1: Spanish recortador executing a bull-leap. Carbello, A., 2008, available online at

- [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Recorte\\_sobre\\_un\\_toro\\_-\\_2008.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Recorte_sobre_un_toro_-_2008.jpg)
- Figure 2: The Bull-leaping Fresco from Knossos. Aruz, Benzel & Evans 2008:132, fig.42.
- Figure 3: Bronze from Rethymnon. British Museum website available online at [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/search\\_object\\_image.aspx?objectId=399328&partId=1&searchText=rethymnon&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset\\_id=34842](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?objectId=399328&partId=1&searchText=rethymnon&fromADBC=ad&toADBC=ad&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=1&asset_id=34842)
- Figure 4: Ivory Figure from Knossos. Groenewegen-Frankfort & Ashmole 1971:124, fig.158.
- Figure 5: The Boxer Rhyton (detail). Benson 1966:38, fig.3.
- Figure 6: Agate Seal from Crete. Higgins 1981:181, fig. 231.
- Figure 7: Seal Impression of Bull and Bull-Leaper at a Cubical Structure. Groenewegen-Frankfort & Ashmole 1971:127, fig.165.
- Figure 8: Bronze Ring with Bull-Leaper. Aruz, Benzel & Evans 2008:135, catalogue number 75.
- Figure 9: Syrian Cylinder Seal. Aruz, Benzel & Evans 2008:133, catalogue number 72.
- Figure 10: Two recortadores executing a simultaneous bull-leap. Nuñez, M., 2009, available online at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/worldnews/article-1227768/Spains-amazing-bull-leapers-They-fly-air-greatest-ease--avoid-pair-sharp-horns.html>
- Figure 11: Seal Impression from Aleppo. Rice 1998:160, fig.11.3.
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- Figure 14: Beni Hasan Mural. Rice 1998:138, fig.10.9.
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- Figure 18: Mycenaean Krater from Alalakh. Aslihan Yener 2008, available online at <http://www.archaeology.org/0803/etc/artifact.html>
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## CHAPTER 11: THE BULL AND COMPOSITE BULL FIGURES AS PROTECTIVE BEINGS

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- Figure 4: Lamp in the shape of a human-headed bull. Van Dijk, R.M., photograph taken at the British Museum, May 2006.
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- Figure 6: Recumbent human-headed bull from Lagash. Van Dijk, R.M., photograph taken at the Louvre, April 2010.
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- Figure 17: Bracelet with calf-head terminals from Arlsan Tash. Van Dijk, R.M., photograph taken at the Louvre, April 2010.
- Figure 18: Facade D/E of of Ashurnasirpal II's Northwest Palace at Nimrud. M.chohan, 8 August 2007, available online at [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iraq%3B\\_Nimrud\\_-\\_Assyria,\\_Lamasu%27s\\_Guarding\\_Palace\\_Entrance.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iraq%3B_Nimrud_-_Assyria,_Lamasu%27s_Guarding_Palace_Entrance.jpg)
- Figure 19: Bull gateway guardians of the Gate of All Nations at Persepolis. Koch 2006:105.
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- Figure 25: Human-headed bull throne fitting from Toprakkale. British Museum website, available online at [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database/search\\_object\\_image.aspx?objectId=369937&partId=1&searchText=toprakkale+bull&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=3&asset\\_id=582746](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database/search_object_image.aspx?objectId=369937&partId=1&searchText=toprakkale+bull&orig=%2fresearch%2fsearch_the_collection_database.aspx&numPages=10&currentPage=3&asset_id=582746)

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