

A RAM'S HEAD HANDLE FROM SIDON

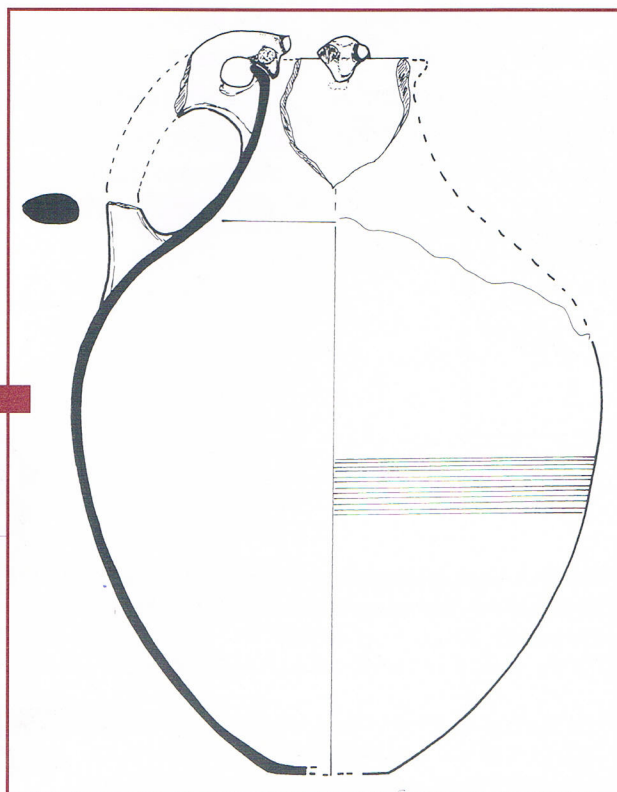
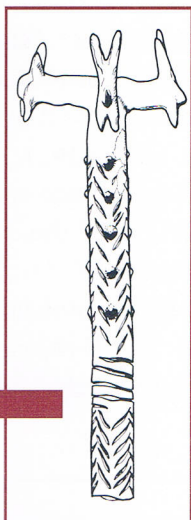
Claude Doumet-Serhal

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From the first attempts at image making in the Near East, bulls, ovicaprines, and cervids dominated the repertoire of art motifs¹. Sheep and goats in particular, were believed to have protective powers over flocks and herds as represented in the Chalcolithic art of ancient Palestine. Distinct regional styles in ritual and funerary furniture were endowed with these animal representations. Basalt pillar statues from the Golanite assemblage are sometimes portrayed with horns and other animal features clearly associating them with sheep and goats². Metal standards with a pair

(fig.1) of ibexes projecting from the top with a central antelope³ have been interpreted, because of the number of animals depicted, as having increased ritual potency⁴. A preoccupation with flocks and herds is likewise apparent at Hazor where a number of ossuaries take the form of an animal⁵. Horns symbolising the godhead as a protector of flocks may also suggest the male god in ibex form⁶. The ibex appears in dotted impressions on sherds from Ghassul, which have been interpreted as amulets of protection and good luck⁷. These time-honoured symbols were continuously in use, in a variety of forms, until the Early Bronze Age. However, certain regional differences do occur in the form taken by sheep and goats.

In a first season of excavations undertaken in the summer of 1998 in Sidon with the support of the British Museum⁸, a pile of fallen stones was found at the NW/SE of square 1 on which a door-socket was also found. A black silty floor of a sticky



1. Nahal Mishmar, Chalcolithic period.

2-3. Sidon, 1998 excavation. Early Bronze Age III.

This jug was first submitted for publication in 1999 in *BAAL* see note n° 9.

1. D. Schmandt-Besserat, 1997, "Animal Symbols at 'Ain Ghazal", *Expedition*, 39, n° 1, p. 55.
2. C. Epstein, 1975, "Basalt Pillar Figures from the Golan", *Israel Exploration Journal*, 25, 4, p. 198,

fig. 3, 7; C. Epstein, 1978, "Aspects of Symbolism in Chalcolithic Palestine", in *Archaeology in the Levant, Essays for Kathleen Kenyon*, edit. R. Moorey & P. Parr, Warminster, pl. 2, 2; P. Bar-Adon, 1980, *The Cave of the Treasure, the Finds from the Caves in Nahal Mishmar*, Jerusalem, p. 42, n° 17.

3. P. Beck, 1989, "Notes on the Style and Iconography of the Chalcolithic Hoard from Nahal Mishmar", in *Essays in Ancient Civilization presented to Helene J. Kantor*, edit. A. Leonard & B. B. Williams, Chicago, p. 42, 43.

4. C. Elliott, 1977, "The Religious Beliefs of the Ghassulians c. 4000-3100 B.C.", *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, p. 7.

5. C. Epstein, *op cit.*, p. 26.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

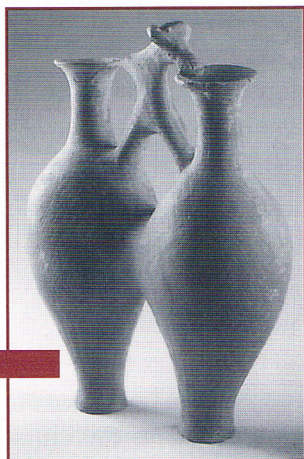
7. C. Elliott, *op cit.*, p. 7.

8. J. Curtis, 1999, "New Excavation at Sidon", *National Museum News*, 10, p. 28-29.

**A RAM'S HEAD HANDLE
FROM SIDON**

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upright position with its head resting on the rim",

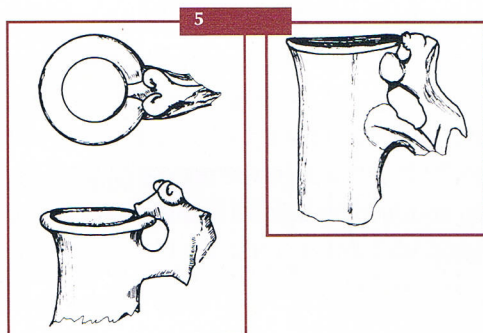


consistency was uncovered with *in situ* pottery dated to Early Bronze Age III⁹.

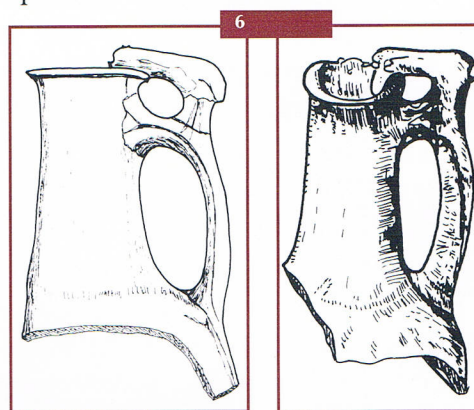
A small jug (fig. 2-3) with a loop-handle springing from its flaring rim to its shoulder and surmounted by the head of a quadruped, "a ram in an upright position with its head resting on the rim", was also discovered. The jug is 17.5 cm high, oval in shape (diameter. 12.5 cm), almost perfectly symmetrical and widest at the shoulders. The diameter of the base (3 cm) is slightly smaller than the neck (3.4 cm).

The Sidon example found in 1998 is very similar to one attached to a twin jar found in Byblos dated between 3100 to 2800 BC¹⁰ (fig. 4).

The twin jar is reminiscent of those vessels that represent the diagnostic ceramic features of the Chalcolithic period in Palestine.



Maurice Dunand found other examples in Byblos (fig. 5-6) in a single structure where cult-objects were found *in situ* on the floor. Dunand assigned this structure to the "period of the Amorite¹¹ conquest".



The position of this structure within the "sacred enclosure" indicates that it was actually erected after an earlier structure had been destroyed by fire at the end of the VIth Dynasty (2260 BC). This was before vast rebuilding had taken place within the same enclosure at the beginning of the XIIth Dynasty (end of the third millennium BC¹²).

It is also worth noting that the caprids protruding-above-rim jugs found at Sidon and Byblos, are only associated with slow-pouring vessels.



9 C. Doumet-Serhal, 1999, "First Season of Excavation at Sidon; Preliminary Report", *Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaïses*; C. Doumet-Serhal, 1999, "Discoveries in Little Sidon", *National Museum News*, 10, p. 29-39.

10 D. Baramki, 1973, "A tomb of the Early and Middle Bronze Age at Byblos", *Berytus*, XXVI, p. 27, 28, fig. 1.

11 M. Dunand, 1954, *Fouilles de Byblos*, II, Tome I, Paris, n° 12842, fig. 637, p. 555; no 15758, fig. 913, p. 799; pl. CLXXIV, 14284, 15757, 42, 12261.

12 O. Negbi, 1972, "Contacts between Byblos and Cyprus at the end of the third millennium BC", *Levant*, IV, p. 98, 109, 110.

4. Byblos, 3100-2800 BC.
- 5-6. Byblos, end of the third millennium BC.
7. Ras Shamra, fifth millennium BC.
8. Teleilat Ghassul, Chalcolithic period.
9. Nahal Mishmar, Chalcolithic period.
10. Beth Yerah/Khirbet el-Kerak, Early Bronze Age III.
11. Mari, beginning of the second millennium.

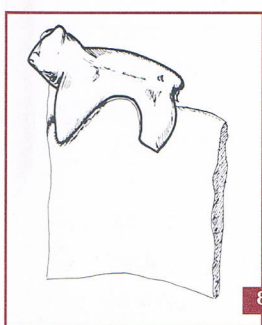
Other animals are also represented

in an upright position protruding-above-rim.

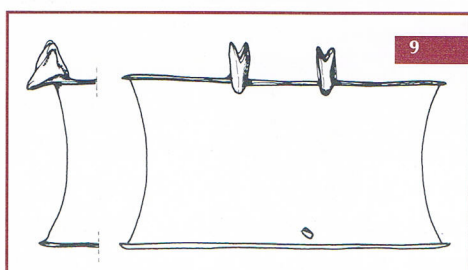
BOVINES

*SYRIA

Other horned animals, mainly bovines, were found protruding-above-rim at Ras Shamra/Ugarit. In level IVB (5th millennium) a painted fragment of a canine or bovine image (fig. 7) was found together with painted pottery of the Halafian style¹³.



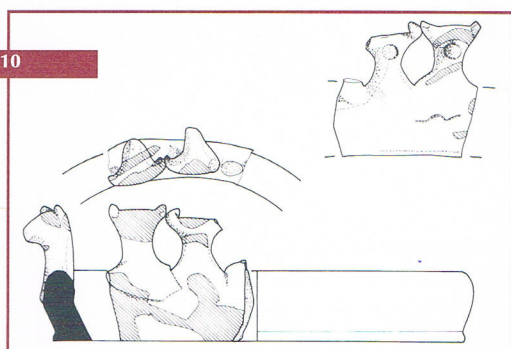
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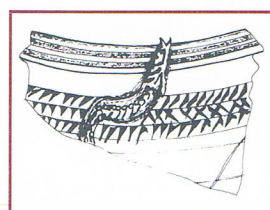
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*PALESTINE

Horned animals are found projecting above bowl rims¹⁴ (fig. 8) in level IV at Teleilat Ghassul and on a copper crown n° 10¹⁵ from Nahal Mishmar (fig. 9). A ring-walled ceramic, a cult-stand, was



10



11

SNAKES

* SYRIA

Several fragments with snakes applied in relief were found in the temple of Ishtar at Mari dated to the beginning of the second millennium¹⁸ (fig. 11). A bowl (fig. 12) decorated with a pair of snakes and scorpions which cling to its sides was found on the floor of a house at Tell Brak also dated to the Third Dynasty¹⁹ of Ur.

13 H. de Contenson, 1973, "Le niveau halafien de Ras Shamra; rapport préliminaire sur les campagnes 1968-1972 dans le sondage préhistorique", *Syria*, L, p. 31, fig. 17; H. de Contenson, 1992, *Préhistoire de Ras Shamra; les sondages stratigraphiques de 1955 à 1976*, I, texte, II, figures et planches, *Ras Shamra-Ougarit VIII*, Paris, pl. CLI, 4, p. 403, niveau IV B4 (dernier quart

du VIème au troisième quart du Vème millénaire).

14 A. Mallon & R. Koeppel and R. Neuville, 1934, *Teleilat Ghassul I*, Rome, p. 83, fig. 35, 8; C. Elliott, 1978, "The Ghassulian Culture in Palestine: Origins, Influences and Abandonment", *Levant*, 10, p. 47-49.

15 P. Bar-Adon, 1980, *op cit.*, p. 32.

16 R. Amiran, 1989, "Re-Examination of a Cult-and-Art Object from Beth Yerah", in *Essays in Ancient Civilization presented to Helene J. Kantor*, edit. A. Leonard & B. B. Williams, Chicago, pl. 6, a, b.

17 R. M. Boehmer, 1972, "Die Keramikfunde im Bereich des Steingebäudes", in J. Schmidt, XXVI. und XXVII. *Vorläufiger Bericht über die von dem Deutschen Archäologischen Institut und der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft aus Mitteln der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft unternommenen Ausgrabungen in Uruk-Warka*, Berlin, pl. 51, 212, Obeid period; H. Kühne, 1976, *Die Keramik Syrien-Palästina, der von Tell Chuera und ihre Beziehungen zu Funden aus der Türkei und dem Iraq*, Berlin, pl. 27, 4, 5 (Early Dynastic); C. Elliott, 1978, *op cit.*, p.42.

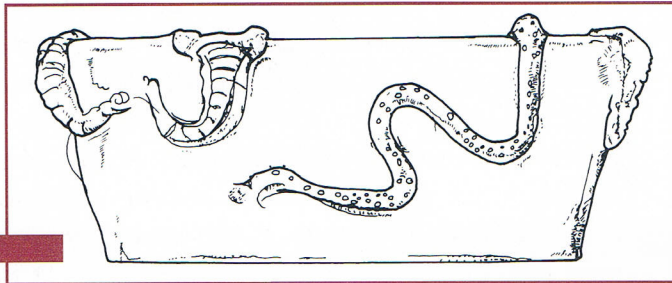
18 A. Parrot, 1956, *Mission archéologique de Mari, I, Le temple d'Ishtar*, Paris, p. 231, pl. LXXII, 510, 511.

19 M. E. L. Mallowan, 1947, "Excavations at Brak and Chagar Bazar", *Iraq*, IX, p. 229-230, pl. LXX, 1-5.

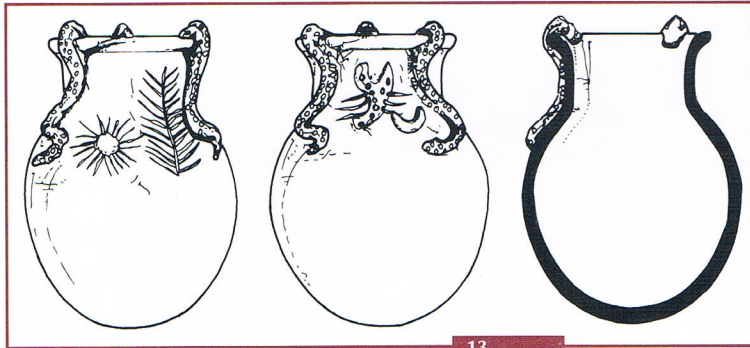
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Another vase (fig. 13) also from Tell Brak and dating to the Third Dynasty of Ur (end of third millennium BC)²⁰ is decorated with an appliqué scorpion and three snakes, the heads of which are dipping into the vase.



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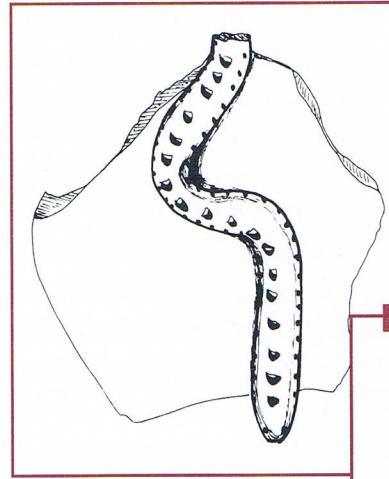
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* PALESTINE

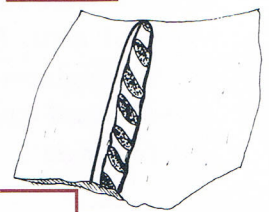
Serpents moulded in relief on the surface of vessels are extremely common in Palestine. The earliest specimens date to the Chalcolithic period at Teleilat Ghassul²¹ (fig. 14).

The snake is either plain or decorated with incised

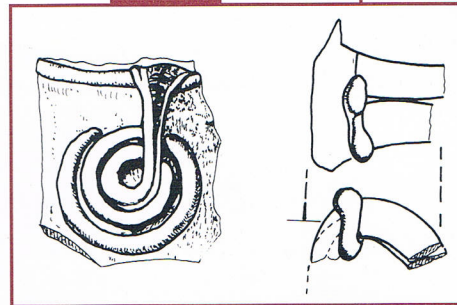
or dotted marks. The same motif occurs in EBI at Jericho²² (fig. 15) and at many other Palestinian sites until the



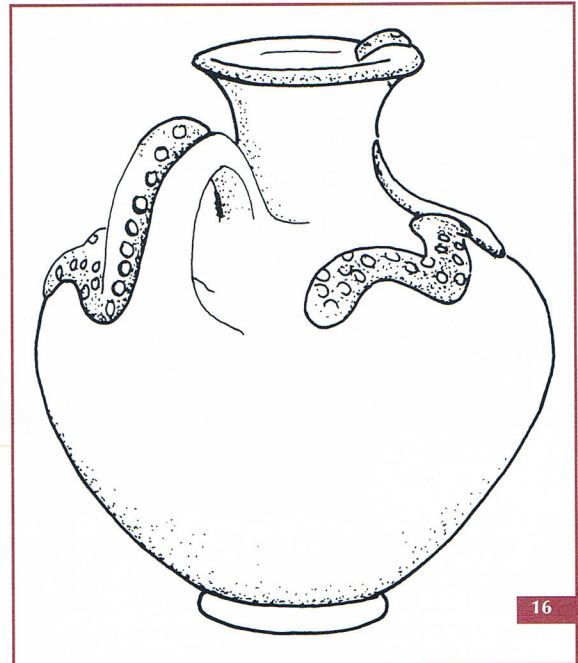
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15



Late Bronze Age²³ (fig. 16).



16

20 *Ibid.*, p. 229-230.

21 R. Koepfel, 1940, *Teleilat Ghassul II*, Rome, pl. 97, 17, p. 59; A. Mallon, R. Koepfel & R. Neuville, *et al.*, *op cit.*, pl. 52, 1, 2.

22 J. Garstang, 1935, "Jericho: City and Necropolis", *Liverpool Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology*, 22, pl. XXXVII, 22, 23.

23 O. Keel, 1992, *Das Recht der Bilder gesehen zu werden*, *Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis*, 122, Göttingen, p. 234-237; W. F. Albright, 1932, "The Excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim in Palestine, I, The Pottery of the First Three Campaigns", *The Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, XII, p. 13.

12-13. Tell Brak, Third Dynasty of Ur (end of third millennium BC).

14. Teleilat Ghassul, Chalcolithic period.

15. Jericho, Early Bronze Age I.

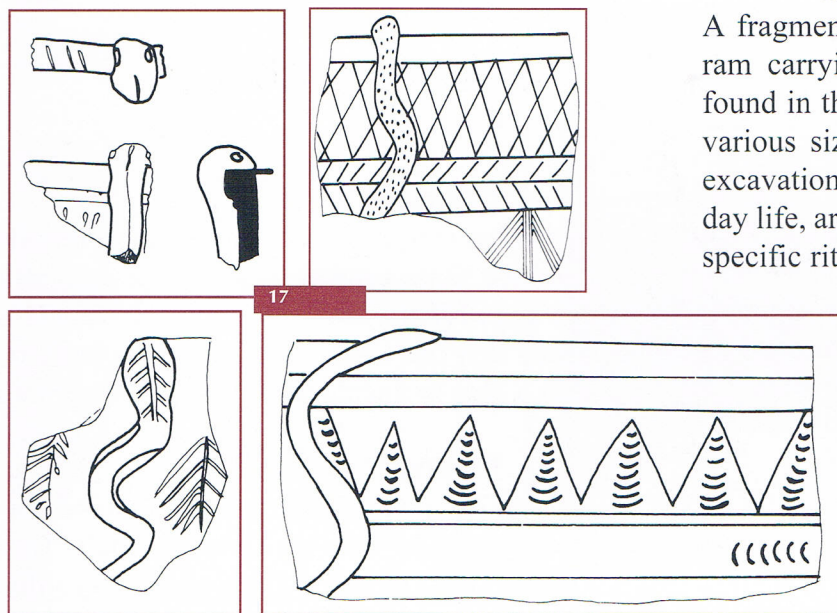
16. Beth Shemesh, Late Bronze Age.

17. Tepe Gawra, end of the Jemdet-Nasr period-Third Dynasty of Ur.

18. Nuzi, end of the third millennium.

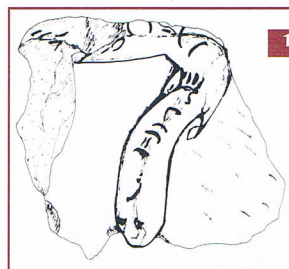
*NORTHERN MESOPOTAMIA

The Halafian snakes, with dotted bodies, occur only as painted motifs. Other examples were found in levels H and G from the archaic Ishtar Temple at Assur dating to the fourth and third millennium²⁴. The prevalence of snakes moulded in relief occur on the surface of bowls and large jars from Str. VII (the end of the Jemdet-Nasr period) to Str. IV (The Third Dynasty of Ur) at Tepe Gawra (fig. 17) indicating cult objects²⁵. One snake has a tree incised on its back and on either side of its body. At Nuzi (temple F and G) several sherds with snakes in relief were found at the end of the third millennium²⁶ (Third Dynasty of Ur) (fig. 18).



17

Horned animals depicted on pottery are also represented in Chalcolithic/ EBI in two different ways:



18

Carrying or standing in a vessel

CAPRIDS & BOVINES

An animal carrying a pointed juglet on its back is, according to R. Amiran²⁷, typical of the sculptured stone vases of Uruk art. The pottery vessels from Palestine seem, at least in concept, to have a distant relationship to these Mesopotamian stone vessels.

* PALESTINE

A fragmentary statuette of an animal, possibly a ram carrying two churns (one broken off), was found in the temple at En-Gedi. Pottery churns of various sizes (fig. 19) are frequently found in excavations and although they were used in everyday life, are according to Amiran²⁸, associated with specific rituals.

A ram with three cornets on its back was found at Gilat in the Northern Negev²⁹ (fig. 20). The ram is hollow so that liquid poured into the cornets would flow into the ram's body. This and the portrayal of its sexual organs suggests that it may have been used in cult rituals related to the fertility

24 W. Andrae, 1922, *Die Archaischen Ishtar-Tempel in Assur*, Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 39, Berlin, pl. 21, b, c, e, h.

25 E. A. Speiser, 1935, *Excavations at Tepe Gawra*, I, Philadelphia, p. 112, 157, pl. LXXVI, 7 (stratum VII end of Jemdet Nasr period), 12 (str. 5, p. 160), 13 (str. IV Third Dynasty of Ur, 2250 BC), p. 183.

26 R. F. S. Starr, 1937, *Nuzi*, II, plates and plans, Baltimore, pl. 60 E1 & A1, 2, 3., p. 373.

27 R. Amiran, 1981, "Some observations on Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age Sanctuaries and Religion, in *Temples and High Places in Biblical Times*. Proceedings of the Colloquium in honor of the Centennial of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Jerusalem, 14-16 March 1977, Jerusalem, p. 49-52, fig. 2, p. 50.

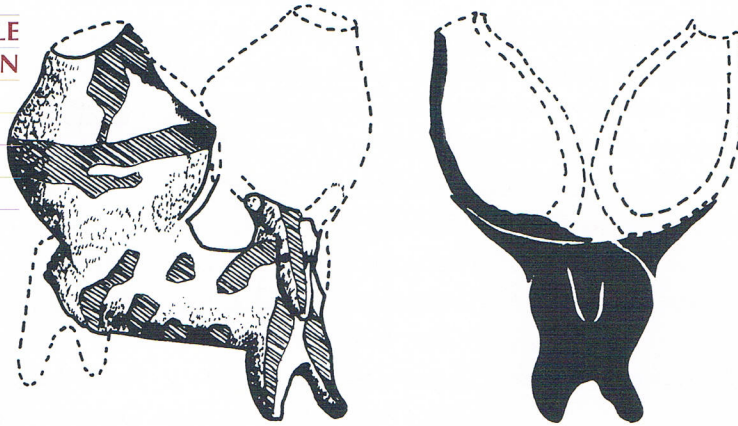
28 R. Amiran, 1981, *op cit.*, p. 51-52.

29 D. Alon & Th. E. Levy, 1989, "The Archaeology of Cult and the Chalcolithic Sanctuary at Gilat", *Journal of Mediterranean Archaeology*, 2/2, p. 190-194, fig. 8, p. 191 & fig. 9, p. 192.

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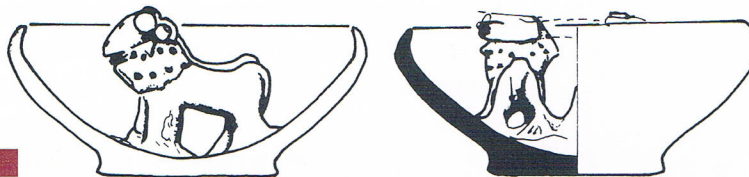
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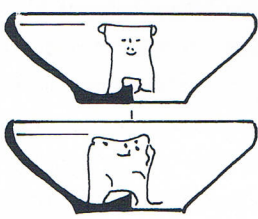


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21



22



of sheep/goat herds.

A bowl was found in Tomb 14 at Tell el-Farah north (fig. 21) which dates to the Early Bronze I period with the figure of an ox/bull standing in its center³⁰. Another bowl

(fig. 22), (EBI)³¹, similar to the one from Tell el-Farah contained paired oxen; it is assumed to have been found in a tomb near the latter site.

Caprids or cervids are also found depicted below the rims on pottery in Mesopotamia, Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine.

Applied on pottery below the rim

CAPRIDS

* LEBANON

At Byblos (fig. 23), the combed-ware on oil-jars bears the same applied symbol or trademark of a ram's head (Early Bronze I or II)³². Mazzoni³³ suggested that this small appliqué ram's head might offer a clue to tracing the origins of these vessels.

* EGYPT

An applied ram's head was also found on the shoulder of a jar from the Giza necropolis Tomb G 7330A (IVth Dynasty) which points, according to

30 R. De Vaux, 1952, "La quatrième campagne de fouilles à Tell el-Farah, près Naplouse", *Revue Biblique*, 59, p. 580, pl. XIV, fig. 12, 6.

31 R. Amiran, 1986, "Some Cult-and-Art Objects of the EBI Period", *Insight Through Images, Studies in Honor of Edith Porada*, edit. M. Kelly-Buccellati & P. Matthiae and M. Van Loon, Malibu, p. 13, fig. 3.

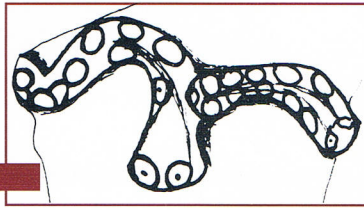
32 M. Dunand, *op cit.*, p. 585, fig. 680 (no 13130-13244), p. 719, fig. 855 (no 14104), p. 789, fig. 896, (n°15651), p. 1015, fig. 1122 (n° 18575-18815-18950); D. L. Esse, 1991, *Subsistence, Trade, and Social Change in Early Bronze Age Palestine, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization*, n° 50, Chicago, Illinois, p. 112 & ann. 211.

33 S. Mazzoni, 1987, "The diffusion of the Palestinian Combed Jars", in *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Palestine, Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Palestine Antiquities*, II, Aleppo, p. 148.

34 D. L. Esse, *op cit.*, p. 112; S. Mazzoni, *op cit.*, p. 237.

19. En-Gedi, Chalcolithic period.
20. Gilat, Chalcolithic period.
21. Tell el-Farah north Early Bronze Age I.
22. Tomb near Tell el-Farah, Chalcolithic period.
23. Byblos, Early Bronze I or II.
24. Teleilat Ghassul, Chalcolithic period.
25. Umm Dabaghiyah, Chalcolithic period.

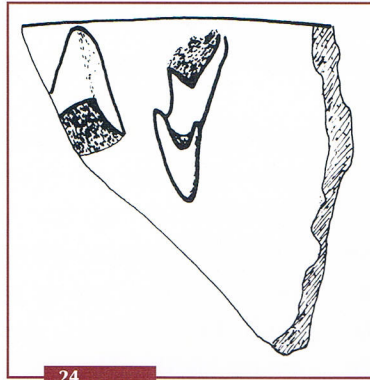
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Mazzoni, to it being an import from Byblos since at least two jar fragments bearing the same appliqué ram's heads were found there³⁴.

* PALESTINE

A small fragment of a rim with two moulded gazelles looking toward the base, was found at Teleilat Ghassul in level IVB. The gazelles are placed



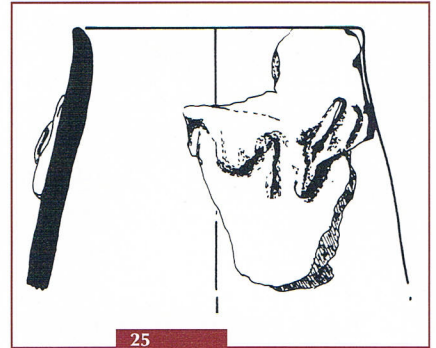
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just below the rim, on the interior of an open-mouth bowl³⁵ (fig. 24).

The distribution of this motif in the Early Bronze Age is more wide spread than was previously thought³⁶. A similar appliqué head was discovered at Megiddo, stratum XVIII (EB II or EB III) whereby in Jericho (EB) the ram's head is replaced in one case by a bucranium from level IV or V which was dated to EBII. At Ai and Lachish the same type of head is dated to EB III or possibly earlier.

* MESOPOTAMIA

The most common decoration is the applied full-face animal heads that seem to anticipate Halaf. Many examples, such as at Umm



25

Dabaghiyah, consist of ram and goat heads applied on the pot³⁷ (fig. 25). In addition to wall paintings, horned animal heads are found applied on pottery below the rim.

All the above-mentioned animals, caprids, bovines and snake images occur in Palestine in the Chalcolithic /EBI periods; Palestine being at the time a melting pot. The distribution of other images indicates, it seems, a sort of parting of the ways. The snake, especially revered from earlier times, recurs more frequently at many Western Asiatic sites well into the end of the second millennium. The caprid, not found in Mesopotamia (with the exception of the early example at Umm Dabaghiyah) or Syria, is however the only animal applied on vessels and often protruding above the rim, in Lebanon. Two sites, Byblos and Sidon, at a specific time, namely the Early Bronze Age, chose the ram as a cultural symbol of their own for a specific type of slow-pouring vessel, namely the jug. It might be unwise to draw too many conclusions from a single type of artifact but it could very well be another indication of the close parallel developments between Sidon and Byblos that has already been underlined in the excavation of the Late Chalcolithic/EBI occupation at Dakerman near Sidon. Scholars³⁸ have noted at both sites, a similarity in the environment, a similar method of burial as well as a similarity in the architectural tradition.

The Chalcolithic Age in the Levant was a period in which agriculture and stockbreeding was basic to the economy³⁹. This paper has shown that some aspects of Chalcolithic iconography had their origins in beliefs current in much earlier times, these being introduced during the fourth millennium BC⁴⁰. This would account for regional differences for the same widely accepted range of symbols.

35 R. Koepfel, 1940, *op cit.*, pl. 97, 20, p. 84.

36 D. L. Esse, *op cit.*, p. 112-113.

37 D. Kirkbride, 1973, "Umm Dabaghiyah 1972: A second preliminary report", *Iraq*, XXXV, pl. III, 4, 8.

38 K. Prag, 1986, "Byblos and Egypt in the fourth millennium B.C.", *Levant*, XVIII, p. 61; R. Saidah, 1979, "Fouilles de Sidon-Dakerman: l'agglomération Chalcolithique", *Berytus*, XXVII, p. 29-55; E. Braun, 1989, "The transition from the Chalcolithic to the Early Bronze Age in northern Israel and Jordan: is there a missing link?", p. 15-16 in, P. de Miroschedji, 1989, *L'urbanisation de la Palestine à l'âge du Bronze ancien*, Actes du Colloque d'Emmaüs (20-24 octobre 1986), Oxford; E. Eisenberg, 1989, "The Chalcolithic and Early Bronze Age I occupations at Tell Teo", p. 38 in, P. de Miroschedji, 1989, *L'urbanisation de la Palestine à l'âge du Bronze ancien*, Actes du Colloque d'Emmaüs (20-24 octobre 1986), Oxford.

39 P. de Miroschedji, 1971, "L'époque pré-urbaine en Palestine", *Cahiers de la revue biblique*, 13, p. 89; C. Epstein, 1978, *op cit.*, p. 32-33.

40 *Ibid.*, Amiran, 1989, p. 32-33.