



McDONALD INSTITUTE CONVERSATIONS

# Fierce lions, angry mice and fat-tailed sheep

Animal encounters  
in the ancient Near East

Edited by Laerke Recht & Christina Tsouparopoulou



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*with contributions from*

Francesca Alhaique, Troels Pank Arbøll, Laura Battini, Malwina Brachmańska,  
Franco D'Agostino, Anne Devillers, Hekmat Dirbas, Neil Erskine, Marina Fadum,  
Jill Goulder, Haskel J. Greenfield, Tina L. Greenfield, Ben Greet, Carina Gruber,  
Tuna Kalaycı, Michael Kozuh, Aren M. Maeir, Timothy Matney, Alice Mouton,  
Seraina Nett, Olga V. Popova, Louise Quillien, Laerke Recht, Licia Romano, Jon Ross,  
Szilvia Sövegjártó, Christina Tsouparopoulou, Lorenzo Verderame, Andréa Vilela,  
John Wainwright & Chikako E. Watanabe

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eaj31@cam.ac.uk  
www.mcdonald.cam.ac.uk



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## CONTRIBUTORS

FRANCESCA ALHAIQUE

Servizio di Bioarcheologia, Museo delle Civiltà,  
Piazza G. Marconi 14, 00144 Rome, Italy

Email: francesca.alhaique@beniculturali.it

TROELS PANK ARBØLL

Linacre College, University of Oxford, St Cross  
Road, Oxford OX1 3JA

Email: troels.arboell@gmail.com

LAURA BATTINI

UMR 7192, CNRS-Collège de France, 52 rue du  
Cardinal Lemoine, 75005 Paris, France

Email: laura.battini@college-de-france.fr

MALWINA BRACHMAŃSKA

Department of Archaeology, Adam Mickiewicz  
University, Poznań, 61-614, Poland

Email: malwina.brachmanska@gmail.com

FRANCO D'AGOSTINO

Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali, 'Sapienza'  
Università di Roma, Circonvallazione Tiburtina, 4,  
00185 Rome, Italy

Email: franco.dagostino@uniroma1.it

ANNE DEVILLERS

Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, Rue  
Vautier 29, 1000 Brussels, Belgium

Email: as.devillers@gmail.com

HEKMAT DIRBAS

Ohio State University, 314 Hagerty Hall, 1775  
College Rd, 43210 Columbus, OH, USA

Email: dirbas.hek@hotmail.com

NEIL ERSKINE

School of Humanities, University of Glasgow,  
1 University Gardens, Glasgow G12 8QQ

Email: Neil.Erskine@glasgow.ac.uk

MARINA FADUM

Independent researcher

Email: fadum@gmx.at

JILL GOULDER

UCL Institute of Archaeology, 31–34 Gordon  
Square, Bloomsbury, London WC1H 0PY

Email: j.goulder@alumni.ucl.ac.uk

HASKEL J. GREENFIELD

Near Eastern and Biblical Archaeology Laboratory,  
St. Paul's College, University of Manitoba, 144-70

Dysart Road, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2M6, Canada

Email: haskel.greenfield@umanitoba.ca

TINA L. GREENFIELD

Department of Religion and Culture, St. Thomas  
More College, University of Saskatchewan, 1437

College Dr, Saskatoon SK S7N 0W6, Canada

Email: tlgreenfield@gmail.com

BEN GREET

Department of Religious Studies, University  
of Zurich, Kantonsschulstrasse 1, 8001 Zürich,  
Switzerland

Email: benjamin.greet@gmail.com

CARINA GRUBER

Independent researcher

Email: carina.gruber1991@gmail.com

TUNA KALAYCI

Faculteit Archeologie, Leiden University,  
Einsteinweg 2, 2333 CC Leiden, The Netherlands

Email: t.kalayci@arch.leidenuniv.nl

MICHAEL KOZUH

Department of History, Auburn University, 331  
Thach Hall, Auburn, AL 36849-4360, USA

Email: mgk0001@auburn.edu

AREN M. MAEIR

The Institute of Archaeology, The Martin (Szusz)  
Department of Land of Israel Studies and

Archaeology, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat-Gan  
5290002, Israel

Email: arenmaeir@gmail.com

TIMOTHY MATNEY

Department of Anthropology, University of Akron,  
Olin Hall 237, Akron, OH 44325-1910, USA

Email: matney@uakron.edu

ALICE MOUTON

UMR 8167, CNRS Paris, 27 rue Paul Bert, 94204 Ivry-  
sur-Seine Cedex, France

Email: alice.mouton@cnrs.fr

---

SERAINA NETT

Department of Linguistics and Philology, Uppsala University, Engelska parken, Thunbergsvägen 3H, Sweden  
Email: seraina.nett@lingfil.uu.se

OLGA V. POPOVA

Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Rozhdestvenska st., 12, Moscow, Russian Federation  
Email: olga.v.popova@gmail.com

LOUISE QUILLIEN

CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), ArScAn laboratory (Archéologies et Sciences de l'Antiquité), Nanterre, 92000, France  
Email: louise.quillien@cnrs.fr

LAERKE RECHT

Department of Early Eastern Mediterranean Civilisation, Institut für Antike, University of Graz, Universitätsplatz 3/II, 8010 Graz, Austria  
Email: laerke.recht@uni-graz.at

LICIA ROMANO

Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali, 'Sapienza' Università di Roma, Circonvallazione Tiburtina, 4, 00185 Rome, Italy  
Email: licia.romano@uniroma1.it

JON M. ROSS

Department of Anthropology, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2, Canada  
Email: rossj313@myumanitoba.ca

SZILVIA SÖVEGJÁRTÓ

University of Hamburg, Hauptstrasse 67, 69214 Eppelheim, Germany  
Email: ssoveg@gmail.com

CHRISTINA TSOUPAROPOULOU

Institute of Mediterranean and Oriental Cultures, Polish Academy of Sciences, 72 Nowy Świat St., 00-330 Warsaw, Poland & McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3ER  
Email: ct272@cam.ac.uk

LORENZO VERDERAME

Istituto Italiano di Studi Orientali, 'Sapienza' Università di Roma, Circonvallazione Tiburtina, 4, 00185 Rome, Italy  
Email: lorenzo.verderame@uniroma1.it

ANDRÉA VILELA

Laboratoire Archéorient, Maison de l'Orient et de la Méditerranée, 7 rue Raulin, F-69365 Lyon cedex 07, France  
Email: andrea.vilela@univ-lyon2.fr

JOHN WAINWRIGHT

Department of Geography, Durham University, Lower Mountjoy, South Road, Durham DH1 3LE, UK  
Email: john.wainwright@durham.ac.uk

CHIKAKO E. WATANABE

Faculty of International Studies, Osaka Gakuin University, 2-36-1 Kishibe-Minami, Suita-shi, Osaka 564-8511 Japan  
Email: chikako@ogu.ac.jp

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## Abbreviations and sigla

ABL	Harper, R.F., 1892–1914. <i>Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collection of the British Museum</i> , 14 volumes. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.	ARM 30	Durand, J.-M., 2009. <i>La nomenclature des habits et des textiles dans les textes de Mari</i> . (Archives royales de Mari 30.) Paris: Lib. Paul Geuthner.
AHw	von Soden, W., 1959-1981. <i>Akkadisches Handwörterbuch</i> . Wiesbaden.	AUCT 1	Sigrist, M., 1984. <i>Neo-Sumerian Account Texts in the Horn Archaeological Museum</i> . (Andrews University Cuneiform Texts 1.) Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press.
AKA I	Wallis Budge, E.A. & L.W. King, 1902. <i>Annals of the Kings of Assyria: The Cuneiform Texts with Translations and Transliterations from the Original Documents in the British Museum</i> . Vol. I. London: The Trustees of the British Museum.	BabMed	Babylonian Medicine online [no year]: ‘Corpora’, <a href="https://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/babmed/Corpora/index.html">https://www.geschkult.fu-berlin.de/e/babmed/Corpora/index.html</a>
AMT	Campbell Thompson, R., 1923. <i>Assyrian Medical Texts</i> . Milford, Oxford: Oxford University Press.	BAM	Köcher, F., 1963–1980. <i>Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen</i> , 6 Vols. Berlin: De Gruyter.
AnOr 8	Pohl, A., 1933. <i>Neubabylonische Rechtsurkunden aus den Berliner staatlichen Museen</i> . (Analecta Orientalia 8.) Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum.	BCT 1	Watson, P.J., 1986. <i>Neo-Sumerian Texts from Drehem</i> . (Catalogue of Cuneiform Tablets in Birmingham City Museum I.) Warminster: Aris & Phillips.
AO	Siglum of objects in the Louvre Museum, Paris (Archéologie Orientale).	BIN 1	Keiser, C.E., 1917. <i>Letters and Contracts from Erech Written in the Neo-Babylonian Period</i> . (Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of James B. Nies, vol. 1.) New Haven: Yale University Press.
ARM 2	Jean, Ch.-F., 1950. <i>Lettres diverses</i> . (Archives royales de Mari 2.) Paris: Lib. Paul Geuthner.	BIN 3	Keiser, C.E., 1971. <i>Neo-Sumerian Account Texts from Drehem</i> . (Babylonian Inscriptions in the Collection of B.J. Nies, vol. 3.) New Haven: Yale University Press.
ARM 9	Biro, M., 1958. <i>Textes administratifs de la Salle 5 du Palais</i> . (Archives royales de Mari 9.) Paris: Lib. Paul Geuthner.	BM	Siglum for objects in the British Museum, London.
ARM 10	Dossin, G., 1978. <i>Correspondance feminine</i> . (Archives royales de Mari 10.) Paris: Lib. Paul Geuthner.	BPOA	Biblioteca del Próximo Oriente Antiguo (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2006ff.)
ARM 14	Biro, M., 1974. <i>Lettres de Yaqqim-Addu, gouverneur de Sagarâtum</i> . (Archives royales de Mari 14.) Paris: Lib. Paul Geuthner.	BPOA 6	Sigrist, M., & T. Ozaki, 2009a. <i>Neo-Sumerian Administrative Tablets from the Yale Babylonian Collection. Part One</i> (Biblioteca del Próximo Oriente Antiguo 6.) Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
ARM 15	Bottero, J. & A. Finet, 1954. <i>Repertoire analytique des tomes I à V</i> . (Archives royales de Mari 15.) Paris: Lib. Paul Geuthner.	BPOA 7	Sigrist, M., & T. Ozaki, 2009b. <i>Neo-Sumerian Administrative Tablets from the Yale Babylonian Collection. Part Two</i> (Biblioteca del Próximo Oriente Antiguo 7.) Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas.
ARM 26	Durand, J.-M. et al., 1988. <i>Archives épistolaires de Mari</i> . (Archives royales de Mari 26.) Paris: Lib. Paul Geuthner.	BRM 1	Clay, A.T., 1912. <i>Babylonian Business Transactions of the First Millennium B.C.</i> (Babylonian Records
ARM 27	Biro, M., 1993. <i>Correspondance des gouverneurs de Qaṭṭunân</i> . (Archives royales de Mari 27.) Paris: Lib. Paul Geuthner.		
ARM 28	Kupper, J.-R., 1998. <i>Lettres royales du temps de Zimri-Lim</i> . (Archives royales de Mari 28.) Paris: Lib. Paul Geuthner.		

Abbreviations and sigla

	in the Library of J. Pierpont Morgan, Part 1.) New York: Privately printed.	HSS 14	Lacheman, E.R., 1950. <i>Excavations at Nuzi V. Miscellaneous Texts from Nuzi, Part 2, The Palace and Temple Archives.</i> (Harvard Semitic Studies 14.) Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard Univ. Press.
CAD	<i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.</i> Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1956–2010.	HW <sup>2</sup>	Friedrich, J. & A. Kammerhuber (eds.), 1975–. <i>Hethitisches Wörterbuch. Zweite, völlig neubearbeitete Auflage auf der Grundlage der edierten hethitischen Texte.</i> Heidelberg: Winter.
CBS	Siglum for objects in the University Museum in Philadelphia (Catalogue of the Babylonian Section).	IB	Siglum for finds from Isin (Isan Bahriyat).
CDLI	Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative, <a href="https://cdli.ucla.edu">https://cdli.ucla.edu</a>	IM	Siglum for objects in the Iraq Museum, Baghdad.
CHD	Goedegebuure, P.M., H.G. Güterbock, H.A. Hoffner & T.P.J. van den Hout (eds.), 1980–. <i>The Hittite Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago.</i> Chicago: The Oriental Institute.	ITT 5	de Genouillac, H., 1921. <i>Inventaire des Tablettes de Tello conservées au Musée Imperial Ottoman. Tome V. Époque présargonique, Époque d'Agadé, Époque d'Ur III.</i> Paris: Édition Ernest Leroux.
CM 26	Sharlach, T.M., 2004. <i>Provincial Taxation and the Ur III State.</i> (Cuneiform Monographs 26.) Leiden: Brill.	KAH 2	Schroeder, O. 1922. <i>Keilschrifttexte aus Assur historischen Inhalts, Heft II.</i> (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft 37.) Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung.
CT 22	Campbell Thompson, R., 1906. <i>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in British Museum</i> , vol. 22. London: British Museum.	KBo	<i>Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi</i> (Bd. 1-22 in Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft) Leipzig/Berlin, 1916 ff.
CT 32	King, L.W., 1912. <i>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in British Museum</i> , vol. 32. London: British Museum.	KRI	Kitchen, K.A., 1969–1990. <i>Ramesseide Inscriptions. Historical and Biographical</i> , 8 vols. Oxford: Blackwell.
CT 55	Pinches, T.G. 1982. <i>Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum Part 55. Neo-Babylonian and Achaemenid Economic Texts.</i> London: British Museum Publications.	KUB	<i>Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi</i> , Berlin 1921 ff.
CTH	Laroche, E. 1971. <i>Catalogue des Textes Hittites.</i> Paris: Klincksieck.	LAPO 16	Durand, J.-M., 1997. <i>Les Documents épistolaires du palais de Mari, tome I.</i> (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 16.) Paris: Éditions du cerf.
DAS	Lafont, B., 1985. <i>Documents Administratifs Sumériens, provenant du site de Tello et conservés au Musée du Louvre.</i> Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations.	LAPO 18	Durand, J.-M., 2000. <i>Les Documents épistolaires du palais de Mari, tome III.</i> (Littératures anciennes du Proche-Orient 18.) Paris: Éditions du cerf.
DMMA	Siglum for objects in the Département des Monnaies, médailles et antiques de la Bibliothèque nationale de France.	LD	Lepsius, C.R., 1849–59. <i>Denkmäler aus Aegypten und Aethiopen</i> (plates), 6 vols. Berlin: Nicolaische Buchhandlung.
DUL	Del Olmo Lete, G. & J. Sanmartín, 2015. <i>A Dictionary of the Ugaritic Language in the Alphabetic Tradition.</i> Translated and edited by W.G.E. Watson. Third revised edition. 2 vols. (Handbuch der Orientalistik 112.) Leiden: Brill.	LKU	Falkenstein, A., 1931. <i>Literarische Keilschrifttexte aus Uruk.</i> Berlin: Berlin Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Vorderasiatische Abteilung.
EA	Siglum for the Tell El-Amarna Letters, following the edition of Knudtzon, J. A., 1915. <i>Die El-Amarna-Tafeln.</i> Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung.	M	Siglum for texts from Mari.
ePSD	Electronic version of <i>The Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary</i> , <a href="http://psd.museum.upenn.edu">http://psd.museum.upenn.edu</a>	Moore, Mich. Coll.	Moore, E., 1939. <i>Neo-Babylonian Documents in the University of Michigan Collection.</i> Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
ETCSL	Black, J.A., G. Cunningham, J. Ebeling, E. Flückiger-Hawker, E. Robson, J. Taylor & G. Zólyomi (eds.), 1998–2006. <i>The Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.</i> Oxford, <a href="http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/">http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/</a>	MSL VIII/I	Landsberger, B., 1960. <i>The Fauna of Ancient Mesopotamia. First Part: Tablet XIII.</i> (Materialien zum Sumerischen Lexikon VIII/1.) Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum. [with the assistance of A. Draffkorn Kilmer & E.I. Gordon].
FM 2	Charpin, D. & J.-M. Durand (ed.), 1994. <i>Recueil d'études à la mémoire de Maurice Birot.</i> (Florilegium Marianum II.) Paris: Société pour l'étude du Proche-Orient ancien.	MVN 8	Calvot, D., G. Pettinato, S.A. Picchioni & F. Reschid, 1979. <i>Textes économiques du Selluš-Dagan du Musée du Louvre et du Collège de France (D. Calvot). Testi economici dell'Iraq Museum Baghdad.</i> (Materiali per il Vocabolario Neosumerico 8.) Rome: Multigrafica Editrice.
Hh	<i>The Series HAR-ra='hubullu'</i> , Materials for the Sumerian lexicon (MSL), 5, 6, 7, 9, 10 & 11. Rome: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1957–.	MVN 11	Owen, D.I., 1982. <i>Selected Ur III Texts from the Harvard Semitic Museum.</i> (Materiali per il Vocabolario Neosumerico 11.) Rome: Multigrafica Editrice.
		MZ	Siglum for finds from Tell Mozan.
		NBC	Siglum for tablets in the Nies Babylonian Collection of the Yale Babylonian Collection.

Abbreviations and sigla

NCBT	Siglum for tablets in the Newell Collection of Babylonian Tablets, now Yale University, New Haven.	SAA 11	Fales, F.M. & J.N. Postgate, 1995. <i>Imperial Administrative Records, Part II: Provincial and Military Administration</i> . (State Archives of Assyria 11.) Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
OIP 99	Biggs, R.D., 1974. <i>Inscriptions from Tell Abu Salabikh</i> . (Oriental Institute Publications 99.) Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.	SAA 12	Kataja, K. & R. Whiting, 1995. <i>Grants, Decrees and Gifts of the Neo-Assyrian Period</i> . (State Archives of Assyria 12.) Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
OIP 115	Hilgert, M., 1998. <i>Cuneiform Texts from the Ur III Period in the Oriental Institute, Vol. 1: Drehem Administrative Documents from the Reign of Šulgi</i> . (Oriental Institute Publications 115.) Chicago: The Oriental Institute.	SAA 13	Cole, S.W. & P. Machinist, 1998. <i>Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Priests to Kings Esarhaddon and Assurbanipal</i> . (State Archives of Assyria 13.) Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
OIP 121	Hilgert, M., 1998. <i>Cuneiform Texts from the Ur III Period in the Oriental Institute, Volume 2: Drehem Administrative Documents from the Reign of Amar-Suena</i> . (Oriental Institute Publications 121.) Chicago: The Oriental Institute.	SAA 17	Dietrich, M., 2003. <i>The Neo-Babylonian Correspondence of Sargon and Sennacherib</i> . (State Archives of Assyria 17.) Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.
P	CDLI (Cuneiform Digital Library Initiative) number.	SAA 19	Luukko, M. 2012. <i>The Correspondence of Tiglathpileser III and Sargon II</i> . (State Archives of Assyria 19.) Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.
PDT 1	Çiğ, M., H. Kizilyay & A. Salonen, 1956. <i>Die Puzris-Dagan-Texte der Istanbul Archäologischen Museen Teil 1: Texts Nrr. 1-725</i> . (Academia Scientiarum Fennica Annales, série B, tome 92.) Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica.	SAA 20	Parpola, S. 2017. <i>Assyrian Royal Rituals and Cultic Texts</i> . (State Archives of Assyria 20.) Helsinki: The Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.
PKG 18	Orthmann, W., 1985. <i>Der alte Orient</i> . (Propyläen Kunstgeschichte 18.) Berlin: Propyläen Verlag.	SAT 2	Sigrist, M., 2000. <i>Sumerian Archival Texts. Texts from the Yale Babylonian Collection 2</i> . Bethesda: CDL Press.
PTS	Siglum for unpublished texts in the Princeton Theological Seminary.	SF	Deimel, A., 1923. <i>Schultexte aus Fara</i> . (Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung der Deutschen Orientgesellschaft 43.) Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung.
RGTC	<i>Répertoire géographique des textes cunéiformes</i> . (Beihefte zum Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients, Reihe B.) Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1974–.	SP	Alster, B., 1997. <i>Proverbs of Ancient Sumer</i> . Bethesda: CDL Press.
RIMA 2	Grayson, A.K., 1991. <i>Assyrian Rulers of the Early First Millennium BC I (1114–859 BC)</i> . (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods Vol. 2.) Toronto, Buffalo & London: University of Toronto Press.	TCL 12	Conteneau, G., 1927. <i>Contrats Néo-Babyloniens I, de Téglaṯ-Phalasar III à Nabonide</i> . (Textes cunéiformes, Musées du Louvre 12.) Paris: P. Geuthner.
RIME 1	Frayne, D., 2008. <i>Presargonic Period (2700–2350 BC)</i> . (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods Vol. 1.) Toronto: University of Toronto Press.	TCL 13	Contenau, G., 1929. <i>Contrats néo-babyloniens II. Achéménides et Séleucides</i> . (Textes cunéiformes, Musées du Louvre 13.) Paris: P. Geuthner.
RIME 4	Frayne, D., 1990. <i>Old Babylonian Period (2003–1595 BC)</i> . (The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods Vol. 4.) Toronto: University of Toronto Press.	TRU	Legrain, L., 1912. <i>Le temps des rois d'Ur: recherches sur la société antique d'après des textes nouveaux</i> . (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études 199.) Paris: H. Champion.
RINAP	The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period; Open Richly Annotated Cuneiform Corpus, available at <a href="http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/index.html">http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/rinap/index.html</a>	TU	Thureau-Dangin, F., 1922. <i>Tablettes d'Uruk à l'usage des prêtres du Temple d'Anu au temps des Séleucides</i> . (Musée du Louvre. Département des antiquités orientales. Textes cunéiformes.) Paris: P. Geuthner.
RLA	<i>Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archäologie</i> .	U.	Siglum for finds from Ur.
RS	Siglum for documents from Ras Shamra (Ugarit).	UCP 9/1,I	Lutz, H.F., 1927. <i>Neo-Babylonian Administrative Documents from Erech: Part I</i> . (University of California Publications in Semitic Philology Vol. 9 no. 1/I.) Berkeley (CA): University of California Press.
SAA 2	Parpola, S. & K. Watanabe, 1988. <i>Neo-Assyrian Treaties and Loyalty Oaths</i> . (State Archives of Assyria 2.) Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.	UCP 9/1,II	Lutz, H.F., 1927. <i>Neo-Babylonian Administrative Documents from Erech: Part II</i> . (University of California Publications in Semitic Philology Vol. 9 no. 1/II.) Berkeley (CA): University of California Press.
SAA 7	Fales, F.M. & J.N. Postgate, 1992. <i>Imperial Administrative Records, Part I: Palace and Temple Administration</i> . (State Archives of Assyria 7.) Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.	UDT	Nies, J.B., 1920. <i>Ur Dynasty Tablets: Texts Chiefly from Tello and Drehem Written during the Reigns of Dungi, Bur-Sin, Gimil-Sin and Ibi-Sin</i> . Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung.
SAA 10	Parpola, S. 1993. <i>Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars</i> . (State Archives of Assyria 10.) Helsinki: Helsinki University Press.		

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Abbreviations and sigla

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VA	Siglum for objects in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (Vorderasiatische Abteilung).		<i>et d'Histoire in Genf</i> . Naples: Istituto orientale di Napoli.
VAT	Siglum for objects/tablets in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (Vorderasiatische Abteilung. Tontafeln).	YBC	Siglum for tablets in the Yale Babylonian Collection.
VS 1	Ungnad, A. & L. Messerschmidt, 1907. <i>Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin</i> . Vol. 1, Texts 1–115, Königliche Museen zu Berlin. Sammlung der Vorderasiatischen Altertümer. Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung.	YOS 7	Tremayne, A., 1925. <i>Records from Erech, Time of Cyrus and Cambyses (538-521 B.C.)</i> . (Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts, vol. 7.) New Haven: Yale University Press.
VS 16	Schröder, O., 1917. <i>Altbabylonische Briefe</i> . (Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der königlichen Museen zu Berlin 16.) Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung.	YOS 8	Faust, D.E., 1941. <i>Contracts from Larsa, dated in the Reign of Rim-Sin</i> . (Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts, vol. 8.) New Haven: Yale University Press & London: H. Milford, Oxford University Press.
VS 17	van Dijk, J. 1971. <i>Nicht-kanonische Beschwörungen und sonstige literarische Texte</i> . (Vorderasiatische Schriftdenkmäler der Königlichen Museen zu Berlin 17.) Berlin: Akademie Verlag.	YOS 11	van Dijk, J., A. Goetze & M.I. Hussey, 1985. <i>Early Mesopotamian Incantations and Rituals</i> . (Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts, vol. 11.) New Haven: Yale University Press.
WB	Erman, A. & H. Grapow (eds.), 1971. <i>Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache</i> , 5 vols. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.	YOS 17	Weisberg, D.B., 1980. <i>Texts from the Time of Nebuchadnezzar</i> . (Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts, vol. 17.) New Haven: Yale University Press.
WMAH	Sauren, H., 1969. <i>Wirtschaftsurkunden aus der Zeit der III. Dynastie von Ur im Besitz des Musée d'Art</i>	YOS 19	Beaulieu, P.-A., 2000. <i>Legal and Administrative Texts from the Reign of Nabonidus</i> . (Yale Oriental Series, Babylonian Texts, vol. 19.) New Haven: Yale University Press.

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# Preface

Augusta McMahon

The chapters in this volume invert traditional approaches to past human-animal relationships, placing animals at the forefront of these interactions and celebrating the many ways in which animals enriched or complicated the lives of the inhabitants of the ancient Near East. The authors embrace insights from text, archaeology, art and landscape studies. The volume offers rich evidence for the concept that ‘animals are good to think’ (Levi-Strauss 1963), enabling humans in categorizing the world around us, evaluating our own behaviours, and providing analogies for supernatural powers that are beyond humans’ control. However, totemism has never fit the ancient Near East well, because most animals had varied and endlessly complicated relationships with their human associates, as these chapters vividly describe. Taboos on eating or handling animals ebbed and flowed, and the same animal could have both positive and negative associations in omen texts. Animals were good (or bad) to eat, good (or bad) to think, good (or bad) to live with (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010) and good (or bad) to be. Through detailed, theoretically informed and well-supported case studies, this volume moves the study of human-animal-environment interactions forward, presenting animals as embedded actors in culture rather than simply objectified as human resources or symbols.

The chapters in the first section emphasize the agency of animals via their abilities to resolve crises for humans and deities and to shift between animal and human worlds. Animals have paradoxical affects: as metaphors for wilderness and chaos, or as valued companions, helpers, or votive sacrifices. The variety of interactions and assumptions cautions us to treat animals, as we do humans, as individuals. Reconstruction of animals in past rituals has a long history, usually focused on animals associated with the gods and/or animals used in formal religious sacrifice. But the chapters in the second section also examine

the impact of lesser-known animals and less formal encounters, e.g., in the landscape or in funeral contexts within the home. The value and meanings of animals could vary with context.

The fascination engendered by hybrid or composite figures is also well represented. The persistence of composite figures in the Near East, from fourth millennium BC human-ibex ‘shamans’ on northern Mesopotamian Late Chalcolithic seals to *lamassu* and *mušhuššu* of the first millennium BC, suggests that the division and recombination of animal body elements fulfilled a human need to categorize powerful forces and create a cosmological structure. The anthropomorphizing of animals is another facet of the flexibility of animal identifications in the past. The authors here also grapple with the question of whether composite images represent ideas or costumed ritual participants.

The chapters also cover the most basic of animal-human relations, that of herd management, use in labour, and consumption, digging deeply into details of mobility, breeding and emic classifications. Economic aspects of the human-animal relationship are currently being rejuvenated through archaeological science techniques (e.g., isotopes, ZooMS), which give us unparalleled levels of detail on diet, mobility, herd management, and species. Matching these insights from science, the issues raised here include the value of individual animals versus that assigned to species, the challenges of pests, the status ascribed to and reflected by different meat cuts, animals as status and religious symbols, and animals’ tertiary products or uses (e.g., transport versus traction, bile). These studies allow a more detailed reconstruction of Near Eastern economy and society, as well as emphasizing the flexibility of the relationships between animals, as well as between human and animal.

The authors implicitly advocate for a posthumanist multispecies ethnography, which incorporates

nonhumans and argues for equal care to be given to nonhumans in the realms of shared landscapes, violence, labour and especially ecology (Kirksey & Helmreich 2010; Kopnina 2017; Parathian *et al.* 2018). This approach advocates for nonhumans' agency in creating shared worlds, in contrast to the traditional approach to animals as symbols or resources in the service of humans. Going forward, the challenge will be to convert the acknowledgement of equal cultural contribution into support for nonhuman species to speak for themselves; this shift from passive subject of research inquiry to genuine active agency in academic writing does not have an easy or obvious path, and many nonhuman animals may be overlooked. Indeed, multispecies ethnography ideally seeks to incorporate plants, microbes, stones and more (Ogden *et al.* 2013; Smart 2014), many of which are ephemeral in the archaeological record and all but omitted in ancient texts. However, ancient texts do support a new approach which questions our modern boundaries between species. Our perpetual struggle to translate terms for different species of equids, to distinguish whether a word refers to rats or mice, or to link zooarchaeological remains to lexical lists, reinforces the complexity and flexibility of these concepts, and the futility of attempts at absolute categorization.

The chapters in this volume should inspire colleagues to grapple with animals, nonhumans and contexts that could not be included here. For instance, the snake has as lengthy a history of human engagement in the Near East as does the lion and had similarly unusual powers. While the lion was an icon of strength, the perfect symbol for the proximity of the emotions of awe and fear, the snake has the sneaky ability to slither

between worlds, to avoid capture, and to deliver an almost imperceptible lethal injury. Fear of the snake conquers awe. Like the fox, the presence or actions of the snake, as listed in *Šumma ālu*, may be positive or negative omens. The snake was present at key moments in both Mesopotamian and Biblical literature; its actions (stealing the plant of immortality, offering the fruit of the tree of knowledge) changed the fate of humans forever. Whether represented coiled and copulating on Late Chalcolithic seals, grasped by Late Uruk 'Masters of Animals' or first millennium BC *lamaštu*, snakes and their paradoxical nature deserve deep scrutiny. There are many other nonhuman animals deserving of similar problematization and integration, and the eclectic and exciting research stream represented by this volume shows us the way.

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## Chapter 19

# Ducks, geese and swans: *Anatidae* in Mesopotamian iconography and texts

Laura Battini

The term ‘birds’ covers a diverse range of animals (Akkadian *iššūru*, Sumerian MUŠEN – see Salonen 1973; Veldhuis 2004; CAD I, 210–4). Birds can be domestic, tamed, or wild: domestic like the cock, tamed like the hawk, wild like the eagle or the goose; they can be pets, or kept for aesthetic reasons (e.g. Neo-Assyrian zoological gardens; probably some singing birds) or for their functional role (Fig. 19.1). They belong to three natural elements: air, earth and water, especially in the southern marshes (Battini 2006a, 60–1; 2006b). The fact that they belong to the air brought them closer to the gods, who even sometimes had wings (like Ishtar). They frequently appear in love literature and in literary texts referring to trapping or hunting, or as metaphors for flying, enormous heights and deserted countries (Black 1996, 24–43; Veldhuis 2004; Wasserman 2016, texts 06, 11, 19 (dove); CAD I, 210b–211a). Represented at least from the end of the fourth millennium BC, mainly in glyptic and in clay production, they were soon associated with supernatural beings, from Imdugud/Anzu to the ‘goose goddess’ and Papsukkal.<sup>1</sup> They often appear in glyptic art, though rarely in official representations. Texts, especially lexical, literary, administrative and epistolary, provide other information, while archaeozoological data are very limited due to the fragility of bird bones (for exceptions, see e.g. Qatna, Vila & Gourichon 2007). Ancient birds are therefore still underrepresented in research on the ancient Near East (with the exception of studies in divination – see e.g. Archi 1975; Durand 1997; De Zorzi 2009; Minunno 2013).

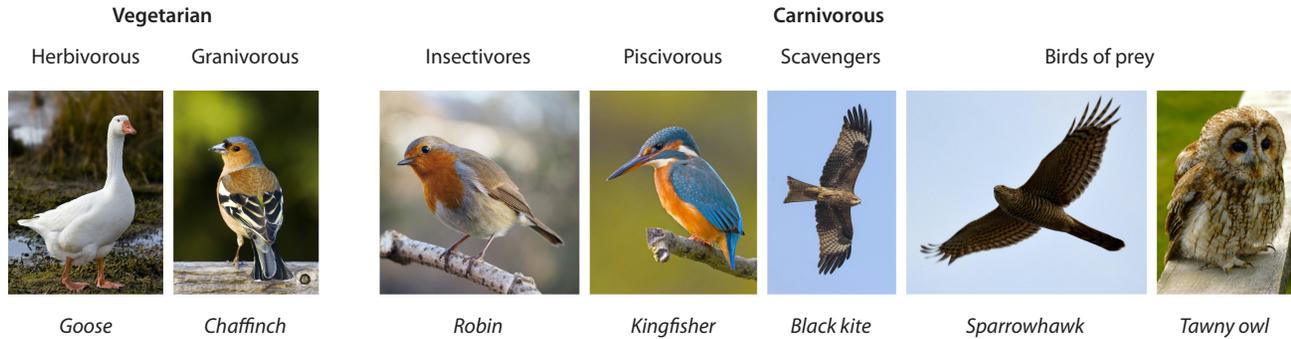
This chapter is intended to fill this gap, focusing on *Anatidae* – that is, geese, swans and ducks. *Anatidae* are broadly diffused in glyptic and in clay production but rarely attested in official representations. Texts, especially administrative ones, provide additional information, while archaeozoological data are very scant. From these various sources, this chapter sketches

a history of human-*Anatidae* relations in historical Mesopotamia. In fact, *Anatidae* are one of the two easiest birds to identify in images due to their long necks (the other being the eagle).

### Difficulties of the research

This research, however, immediately finds some difficulties. Bird skeletons do not preserve well in the archaeological record. For prehistoric Europe, Mourer published a broad series of bird assemblages, often stressing the difficulty of finding full skeletons (e.g. Mourer 1975, 12). Better and more advanced technical skills in the field allow us today to find full skeletons of birds, significantly enriching our knowledge (see for example Gourichon 2002; for Qatna: Vila & Gourichon 2007; for Nippur: Boessneck 1993; Boessneck & Kokabi 1993; for Kamid el Loz: Bökönyi 1990; for Isin: Boessneck 1977; Boessneck & Kokabi 1981). A possible reason for the limited number of bird bones could be attributed to culinary practices: eating duck bones is a well-proven tradition in the French villages of the southeast still today. For the ancient Near East, Bottéro (1995, 58–103, especially 58–60, 74, 82, 88, 90) discusses the preparation of birds before cooking, which entails the removal of the head, legs and entrails, but not the bones, which is very difficult for small birds.

Texts dealing with birds are most often administrative ones. For example, in the Neo-Assyrian period, *Anatidae* are counted as booty and quoted in food lists, especially in sacrifices for the temples (SAA 10, 350; SAA 11, 40; SAA 13, 76, 77; SAA 19, 224; SAA 20, 33). Iconographic data are also difficult to interpret: the relationship between texts and images re-introduces the debate on the possibility of ‘reading’ popular images based on official texts (see Green 1983, 87–8; 1997, 135–58; Wiggermann 1986, 8–9; Lambert 1997, 1–9; Reade 2002; Assante 2002, especially 1–6, 13–21;



**Figure 19.1.** Modern birds (photos from Wiki Commons). Goose (photo by JJ Harrison); chaffinch (photo by MichaelMaggs / Arad); robin (photo by Francis C. Franklin); kingfisher (photo by Andreas Trepte); black kite (photo by Shree Ram Khatri); sparrowhawk (photo by Raju Kasambe); tawny owl (photo by K.-M. Hansche / Arad).

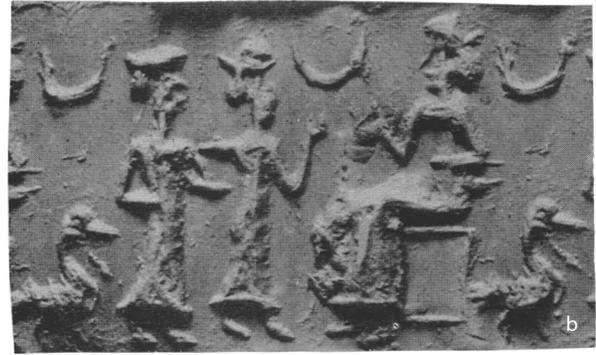
Battini 2009; on the specific difficulties in identifying species of birds, see Battini 2014). The difficulties are so prevalent that scholars hardly attempt to identify the species of birds represented. In fact, since birds primarily appear on cylinder seals, the difficulty of interpretation is understandable: one of the basic elements for identification, colour, is missing. Amiet suggests a strong connection between animals and cosmic functions, more than specific divinities (1956), as I have also suggested for the 'goose goddess' (Battini 2006a). The small size of birds on such objects (2-5 mm) prevents us from determining which species were intended to be represented.

On the other hand, how much have these small dimensions influenced the representation of birds? Did the artisans attempt to depict a specific bird or the generic species? Finally, we must not forget that figurative representations are not necessarily intended to be faithful reproductions of reality: one cannot assume zoological precision from an image (Battini 2009, with further references). For example, the bird accompanying a goddess in the seals and terracottas dated to an era between the Akkadian and the Old Babylonian periods has been identified mostly as a goose (Legrain 1930, 28; van Buren 1930, 78-80; Brentjes 1962, 636; Barrelet 1968, 230-1; Woolley & Mallowan 1976, 178, 181), but also as a swan (van Buren 1930, 80; Woolley & Mallowan 1976, 181), a dove (Brentjes 1962, 636; Barrelet 1968, 230), a duck (al-Gailani 1965, 33-40)<sup>2</sup> and even a wading bird. The term 'goose goddess', coined by Woolley (1926, 375), has been prevalent since in the literature. Forty years later, Opificius accepted this term, even if she recognized some difficulties of always identifying the bird as a goose (1961, 212).

Despite the small dimensions, lack of colours,<sup>3</sup> and potentially doubtful identifications, the birds depicted on reliefs, seals, or represented in 3-dimensional works do not all belong to the same species, like

geese, eagle, partridge, pelican (Fig. 19.2). In the lexical lists, of which those dedicated to birds are among the oldest (Ebla, Shuruppak), the enumeration of many species of birds demonstrate the deep knowledge of these animals. The lexical list HAR-ra=*hubullu* dedicates more than 250 lines to birds, grouped according to the ideogram with which their name begins. Sometimes the list includes parts of the bird body, like the foot (*šēpu*, sum GİR) or the beak (*appu*, sum KIR<sub>4</sub>). Some passages include the names of their young (amar mušen) and even their eggs (nunuz). Thus, a clear understanding of the presence of different species of birds is evident. Further, as Owen stressed in 1981, for over a thousand years, the bird lists were maintained as an integral part of the standard curriculum for the training of young scribes (see also Veldhuis 2004, 62-5).

Last, but not least, people of western industrialized societies have lost contact with nature, with other animals, and with birds. We are used to seeing birds in the zoo or in pet shops, but rarely in nature. In the nineteenth century, the experience of animals was very different. For example, birds were considered from a strictly utilitarian point of view, based on them being either partly or completely damaging for agriculture or for humans (Conrard 1867, vi-xiv). Because they prey on rodents, some birds were considered entirely utilitarian, such as nocturnal birds of prey. Other birds were regarded as partly utilitarian, like insectivores, who, however, as all grain-eating, were also partly pests for agriculture; and other birds were seen purely as pests (diurnal birds of prey) (Conrard 1867, vi, xii-xiv). According to this classification, geese and ducks pertain to the second group, quite helpful but still able to cause damage to agriculture. These observations can aid us in understanding the feelings of people in ancient Mesopotamia. Even though it is not certain that people in ancient Mesopotamia had the same reactions towards geese as people in the nineteenth century, it



**Figure 19.2.** Different breeds of birds represented on different media: a) Ubaid terracotta bird from Ur (31-16-741 © Penn Museum); b) modern impression of a cylinder seal from Ur (Penn Museum 35-1-10, Legrain 1951, pl.19, no. 288); c) detail from a relief of Sargon II palace (BM 118829 © The Trustees of the British Museum); d) modern impression of an Old Babylonian cylinder seal from Diqdiqqah (Penn Museum B16300, Legrain 1951, pl.18, no. 250); e) detail from a relief of Assurnasirpal palace (BM124546 © The Trustees of the British Museum), f) two spread eagles, modern impression of an Ur III cylinder seal from Ur (BM 118684 © The Trustees of the British Museum).

becomes clear that our current views cannot be easily applied to the ancient Near East.

This chapter deals in general with *Anatidae*, and more specifically with geese, which are by far more frequently represented than ducks; occasionally, an identification with the swans has been proposed but it remains unverifiable since we do not even know if the swans were present in Mesopotamia between the end of the third millennium and the beginning of the second millennium (for the methodology of bird identification in ancient images, see Battini 2014). According to biologists, swans were not indigenous to Iraq in ancient times, because the country is too far south (Cramp & Simmons 1977, 370–91; Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992, 577). In Sumerian, ducks are called UZ.MUSEN and UZ.TUR and in Akkadian *paspasu* and possibly *kurukkum*<sup>4</sup> while geese are called respectively U<sub>5</sub> and *kurkû*.<sup>5</sup>

### *Anatidae* in the natural world

*Anatidae* (Etchecopar & Hue 1970, 106–20; Mourer 1975, 30–5; Porter & Aspinall 2016, 20–34) is the large family of waterfowl capable of swimming, floating and diving in shallow water. Their webbed feet aid in swimming and walking. Their weight, their body shape and the position of their short legs, set far to the back of the body (more than in other aquatic birds) make walking more difficult. However, they are stronger walkers than other water birds, such as for example grebes. Their wings are powerful, short, pointed, and supported by strong muscles that generate rapid beat. Therefore, they can fly at a speed of 95 km/h,<sup>6</sup> often in flocks. Like other migratory birds, they fly in a V formation which more than doubles the flight speed compared to a bird that flies alone. Mostly herbivorous and monogamous, they include geese, swans and ducks. Geese and swans belong to the subfamilia *Anserinae*, while ducks belong to the subfamilia *Anatinae* (Etchecopar & Hue 1970, 107–8). However, the classification of the *Anatidae* are still debated.

Swans are among the larger birds, and the largest of the *Anatidae* family. They can reach 1.59 m in height and weigh 15 kg. They have ‘teeth’ which enable them to catch and eat fish. Geese are smaller than swans but larger than ducks. They are more similar to swans than to ducks: they have a long neck and a broad and short bill (Etchecopar & Hue 1970, 106–12; Mourer 1975, 30–2). Geese do not have teeth, but a serrated tongue that helps catch and eat aquatic plants and algae, as well as molluscs and insects. They supplement their diet with grains (barley, oats, wheat, corn), roots, insects, snails and worms. Monogamous, geese and swans live in permanent pairs throughout the year, meaning that they are better fed, more dominant and more fecund

than those isolated. They are very protective of their companion and offspring, often threatened by humans with whom they are not familiar, and very sensitive to movement, making a loud call if sensing danger.<sup>7</sup>

In the domestication process, geese were selected for their size: while domestic geese weigh up to 10 kg, wild geese hardly reach 4 kg. Domestication also changed the structure of their body, from the slim rear and the horizontal posture of wild geese to the large fatty rear and the more upright posture of domesticated geese. Domestic geese are also more fertile than wild ones, laying up to 50 eggs per year, compared to only 5–10 per year for wild geese. Although their heavy weight affects their ability to fly, most breeds of domestic geese are capable of flying.

Ducks are not a monophyletic group. That is, the different species are not biologically linked but assembled together on the basis of common overall forms. This explains the large variety of subfamilies. Most species of ducks are similar to geese, but smaller and lighter. In comparison with geese, they have both smaller legs and shorter neck. Their food is more varied than the *Anserinae*: they can eat grass, aquatic plants, insects, worms, and even fishes, molluscs and small amphibians. Their wide flat beak is well adapted to pulling up waterweed, searching for insect larvae, and pulling worms and small molluscs out of mud. Along the edge of their beak, there is the pecten, a comb-like structure which filters the water and traps food. Contrary to geese and swan, ducks are temporarily monogamous: they have a companion for one year but not for all their life. In most species, it is the mother duck who takes care of the little ones: after hatching the eggs, she brings the ducklings to the water. She rejects ducklings presenting a health problem and leaves unattended the eggs that have not closed at the same time as the others.

Domestic poultry, like geese, ducks and pigeons, are found in tablet XVIII of the series HAR-ra=*hubullu* (Landsberger 1962, 79–173). This tablet deals with ‘special animals’, which are not listed with either wild animals (tablet XIV) or with domestic ones (tablet XIII). Tablet XVIII concerns animals living in a particular ‘milieu’, water for fishes, air for birds. Even domesticated breeds, like poultry, are in the XVIII tablet, grouped according to the ideogram that their name starts with. Therefore, in this tablet, the lexical point of view is more important than the zoological or biological one – as for example the distinction in different species or the distinction between domesticated and wild species. On the other hand, in private letters and in administrative texts, the point of reference seems to be more concerned with ornithology, since geese and ducks are distinguished based on their wild or

domesticated form. However, that does not reflect a real ornithological interest, but rather a need to distinguish between the domesticated forms, for being larger and heavier than the wild ones (Battini 2009). The proverbs mention both wild<sup>8</sup> and domesticated species,<sup>9</sup> while legal texts consider birds as human property, so essentially as domesticated.

Iconographic representations do not generally show *Anatidae* in their natural environment. Such representations are rare, mostly terracottas (Barrelet 1968, nos. 116, 119, 120, 553; Woolley & Mallowan 1976, nos. 209–214; Cholidis 1992, no. 27; Pennsylvania Museum 31-43-319, 331-43-320, 31-43-321 and 31-43-323), and tend to suggest a meaning that goes beyond nature. Some clay miniature objects, like miniature chairs and chariots (Fig. 19.3; see also Ziegler 1962, nos. 128, 129 McCown *et al.* 1967, pl. 143.12; Barrelet 1968, nos. 116, 119, 120; Woolley & Mallowan 1976, nos. 209–214, 231; Cholidis 1992, pl. 13.27; Wrede 2003: nos. 1268, 1269), represent *Anatidae* in their natural habitat on their own (that is, without any other animal or anthropomorphic figures). Here, the symmetrical composition fits well with the natural habitat of these birds living together: they move, sleep, and eat at the same time as their companion. On the model chairs, they are represented in one or three pairs,<sup>10</sup> flying (deployed wings), or standing, and around the pair there are some kind of tree and circles. Trees probably refer to their natural habitat and are an allusion to the vegetarian customs of the bird, but because of their absence of teeth, *Anatidae* rather eat grass and aquatic plants. However, the trees represented in such a context refer rather to the divine sphere, as do the circles. The trees have no clear connection with the geese and so it is quite possible that they have a significance linked to the supernatural world.<sup>11</sup> The tree of life has a long history (Giovino 2007), which begins at least at the end of the third millennium BC, when in some cylinder seals it is depicted on a podium with one or two worshippers paying homage to it (see Parrot 1954, figs. 42–53; Battini forthcoming, 'L'arbre de vie').

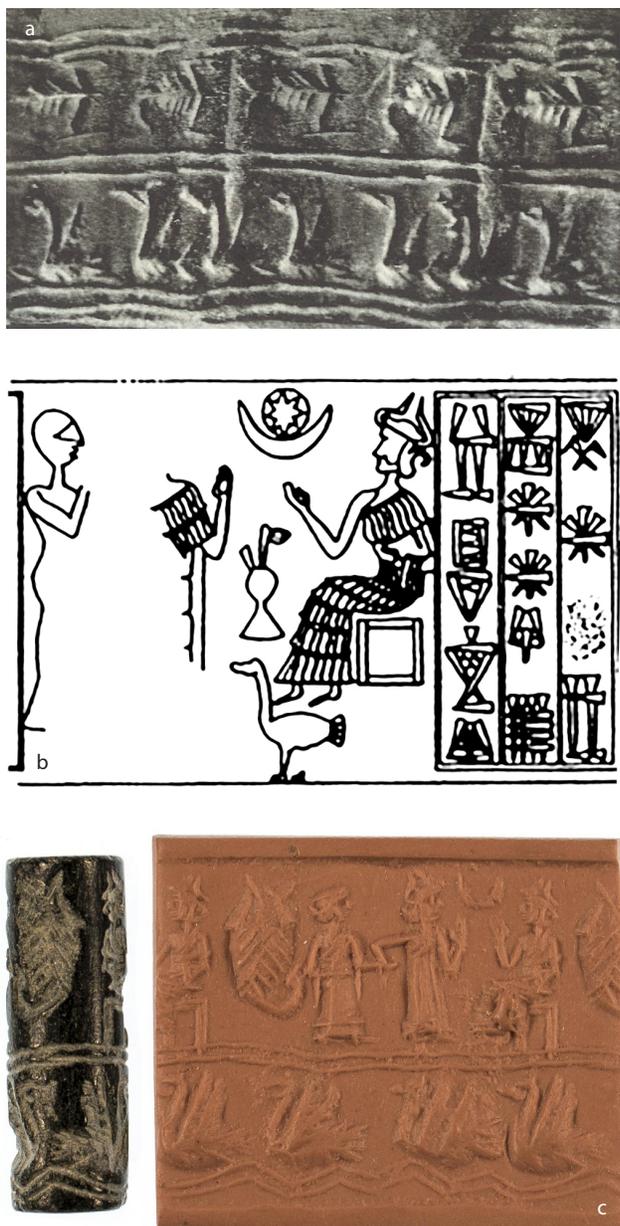
Some seals do represent birds in a natural environment, swimming on the water with their wings wide open (Figs. 19.4a and 19.4c). A few, attested from the third to the first millennia BC, depict the birds unrelated to other anthropomorphic figures (e.g. Moortgat 1940, nos. 46 and 247; Porada 1948, no. 32; Parrot 1954, nos. 18–28; here Fig. 19.4a). The geese most often appear swimming, or seldom walking, and sometimes accompanied by other animals, most often scorpions, which are very symbolic animals.<sup>12</sup> If the birds are described with attention, prove of the interest for the natural world, their insertion into the scene gives them a rather symbolic meaning. This is increased by the engraving



**Figure 19.3.** A miniature chair representing geese in natural 'milieu'. Old Babylonian period, from Diqqiqah (BM 116854 © The Trustees of the British Museum).

on a seal:<sup>13</sup> carry pictures of animals on oneself, even if seals have also an identity function, pertains more to the symbolic and apotropaic sphere.

By far the majority of seals depicting geese shows them with other figures: they can be part of the principal scene, which is always an 'introduction' scene, or separated in the lowest register while the principal introduction scene occupies the upper register (e.g. Legrain 1951, nos. 247–253, 255–256; Buchanan 1981, nos. 463, 493; Collon 1982, nos. 236, 286–288, 331–336; here Fig. 19.4c). In the first case, they are represented standing (apart from the case of the 'goose' goddess, where geese serve as chair and footrest for the goddess), and their low fatty rear suggests an identification with domesticated species. In the second case, the geese are depicted in their natural milieu, often in water, swimming, like they do in the marshes of southern Iraq.<sup>14</sup> This image is due to direct observation and can be interpreted as a mark of interest in these birds. But the majority of the representations of *Anatidae* pertain to the human and divine worlds: the human gaze on birds only rarely consider them without a relationship to the anthropomorphic world.



**Figure 19.4.** Cylinder seals with geese: a. geese on their own, modern impression of an Ur III cylinder seal from Tello/Girsu (Parrot 1954, pl. 2, no. 19); and with other figures: b. seal impression on an Ur III cuneiform tablet from Tello (Fisher 1997, no. 10); and c. Ur III cylinder seal from Diqqiqah (BM 119205 © The Trustees of the British Museum).

### *Anatidae* in the human world

Apart from lexical lists and a few occasional references in literary or epistolary compositions, the textual documentation is parsimonious with bird information, ‘yet many of the birds named in these texts (=lexical

lists) rarely, if ever, appear in administrative documents’ (Owen 1981, 29). The breeding of poultry is well attested in the documentation of the Ur III period. At Puzrish-Dagan, the texts belonging to the archive of Shulgi-simti, the wife of Shulgi, mention different species of pigeons, ducks and geese and their eggs (Sharlach 2017, 190–8). A few references of fattened ducks are known from the Early Dynastic period at Girsu and Irisagrig (Feliu 2004, 303–8; Wu 2006, 6). Temples and palaces, at least in the first millennium BC, had a special place where birds were fattened (*bīt iššūri*, the ‘house of the birds’, a kind of fowl run; CAD I, 214a–b). Further, an overseer called *ša ana muḫḫi iššūri* is known in Late Babylonian texts as responsible for supervising royal poultry (CAD I, 214b). *Anatidae* were not only the privilege of kings, they were also the property of private individuals who could own poultry, as demonstrated by private correspondence, for example in Kraus 1964, 113 r.7 and Kraus 1972, 82 r.3 and 7.

Beginning at the end of the third millennium BC, numerous terracotta figurines represent *Anatidae*. These could have been rattles or toys, especially in cases where the entire bird body is represented. One of the oldest known examples of such a terracotta figurine is an object from Tell Billa, dated to the Ur III to Old Babylonian period, housed in the Penn Museum, bearing museum number 31-51-256 (Fig. 19.5c). At 10.5 cm long, it has lost its head, but it can be identified with a rattle as suggested by the dimensions and the little hole on its back. Another example, probably from the same period, and painted, comes from Nippur and is now housed in the Penn Museum, Philadelphia (B 12 245).<sup>15</sup>

The entire bodies of *Anatidae* were also portrayed in personal ornaments, as demonstrated by some very small examples from Ur, dated to the Ur III period (Fig. 19.6).<sup>16</sup> They are interpreted as amulets, but the presence of a hole (pierced through horizontally from side to side or vertically through the back) suggests a use in a necklace or other jewellery. This could also be in line with a possible apotropaic function. Given the position of the hole, when they were carried on a necklace, their head would point down, towards the heart. Their function was thus not purely decorative, but they also had a special meaning, related to the time when they were produced (Ur III) and probably related to the so-called ‘goose goddess’ (see below).

Two further utilitarian uses of *Anatidae* are attested, in medicine and in metrology. Geese and ducks are encountered in the composition of medical mixtures against several diseases, especially diseases of the eye and anus (Fincke 2009; Geller 2016). Although ducks are not clearly identifiable in most of the images including *Anatidae*, they were the most common subject



**Figure 19.5.**  
*Toys in the shape of a goose; objects nos. 31-16-974, 33-35-61 and 31-51-256. Courtesy of the Penn Museum.*



**Figure 19.6.** *Personal ornaments from Ur; objects nos. 31-43-319, 31-43-320, and 31-43-321. Courtesy of the Penn Museum.*



**Figure 19.7.** Culinary text YOS 11, 26 (YBC 8958)  
© Yale Babylonian Collection, photo courtesy of Carl Kaufman.

of weights from the third to the first millennium BC. The reasons for this are still not well understood, but in any case, the manner of representation reveals some interest in these birds. They are represented with the head turned 180°, towards the tail, as when ducks rest and sleep. It is the most fascinating and surprising position of this animal because it can do what no human can do and many civilizations have portrayed ducks in this way.<sup>17</sup> However, I assume in part that the simple and concentrated shape of a resting duck was suitable for weights.

*Anatidae* were also a source of food. Three Old Babylonian culinary texts from the Yale Babylonian Collection deal with recipes that include birds, especially YOS 11, 26 (Fig. 19.7). This tablet is essentially devoted to birds and presents a recipe for goose (Bottéro 1995, 6, 11–15, 58–103). YOS 11 25 presents a recipe of bird broth (Bottéro 1995, 52). Unlike the other two tablets, YOS 11 26 provides more detail on how to proceed in the execution of the recipe. Unfortunately, it is

broken in various places and especially for the goose recipe, it is not easy to understand what is preserved (Bottéro 1995, 85–8). However, the procedure seems consistent for birds: the main thing was to remove the head, entrails and legs and then to carefully wash the remains (Bottéro 1995, 58–60, 74, 82, 88, 90). They were then cooked twice, the first time boiled and the second browned with different seasonings, spices and water. Either the cooking ends, leaving still some water and so the meat is eaten in this soup (Bottéro 1995, 76–8 (recipe B), probably also 86–9 (recipes D and E, but the tablet is very broken)), or once the cooking water is completely consumed, the meat is arranged in a very complicated way. The meat is put on a layer of bread, then covered with vegetables and at the end covered with another layer of bread (Bottéro 1995, 60–72, 83–4, 100–2; recipes A, C, G). The fact that the entire tablet is dedicated to bird recipes suggests that they were an appreciated dish, although perhaps not accessible for all, but well known and cooked in multiple ways.

Apart from their meat, their eggs were also eaten, as is demonstrated by economic and lexical texts from the third millennium BC onwards, which document huge quantities of duck eggs (*nunuz*) to be consumed (Velhuis 2004, 88). The frequency of letters requesting duck eggs is also suggestive of their value. A Sargonid text from the Istanbul Archaeological Museum lists ducks (*us-/uz tur*) for distribution to different people (Foster 2018). An Old Babylonian letter is a request to send duck eggs for one shekel of silver (Kraus 1964, 113 r.7); another asks for ducklings (Kraus 1972, 82 r.3 and 7). In royal banquets, meat and eggs of *Anatidae* were often presented. In celebrating the foundation of his new capital, Assurnasirpal provided a large amount of food, including birds: 1000 big ducks, 500 ducks, 500 geese, 1000 *mesukku* birds, 1000 *qaribu* birds, 10,000 pigeons, 10,000 turtle doves, 10,000 small birds, and so on (Grayson 1991). In this context, three Neo-Babylonian tablets, CT 55 nos. 45, 712 and 713, deserve particular attention. They deal with geese, ducks and the storehouse,<sup>18</sup> but they also have engraved drawings of a goose. The position of the drawing on the edge (tablet no. 712) or on the reverse (tablets nos. 45 and 713) could suggest that their function was to indicate the subject of the tablet but being so rare they are more probably the result of bored scribes (Zawadzky & Jursa 2001, 360).

### *Anatidae* in the divine world

*Anatidae* had a strong connection with the divine world. A popular representation between the Akkadian and the Old Babylonian period in southern Iraq concerns a goose goddess (Battini 2006a, with previous



**Figure 19.8.** *The Goose Goddess: a) Terracotta from Ur, BM 127484 (Maxwell-Hyslop 1992, pl. VII a); b) terracotta from Ur, Old Babylonian period (Woolley & Mallowan 1976, pl. 89 no. 225).*

bibliography). The goose goddess is depicted both on terracottas and on cylinder seals (Fig. 19.8). Different variants of this image can be distinguished,<sup>19</sup> but the same peculiarities can be noticed. Most frequently, the goddess is sitting on one goose, either in profile or in full frontality, sometimes resting her feet on another goose. In one of her hands, she holds a vase with or without gushing water, while her other hand is raised. Several different identifications have been proposed for this goddess, including Baba, Ningal, Nanshe and Gula,<sup>20</sup> but no definite proposal can be made concerning the identity of the goddess, since the texts do not suggest a particular link between this species of birds and a deity.<sup>21</sup> However, these are not official images, so it is difficult to deduce from official texts a non-official *pietas*. The elements that accompany the goddess link her to the sphere of fertility and reproduction (water, fishes, eggs), which were essential concerns in many ancient societies (Battini 2006a).

*Anatidae* were certainly part of temple activities, such as divinations, sacrifices and offerings. From the Ur III (Sharlach 2017, 193, 198)<sup>22</sup> to the Neo-Assyrian period, administrative documents itemize geese and ducks, along with other birds, in the offerings to different deities, as for example Nabu, the goddess Sarrat-shame, Bel and Sikutu, and sometimes Assur (SAA 7, 159, 175, 206, 211, 213). Zoomorphic vessels in the shape of a goose or a duck, found in temples,

confirm the role of *Anatidae* in rituals.<sup>23</sup> Goose-shaped vessels are attested in historical Mesopotamia as early as the Jemdet Nasr period.<sup>24</sup> Geese were also engraved on pottery, especially on a fine grey, sometimes burnished, ware, probably painted and with incisions filled with white paste. This ware has been discovered at different sites in southern Mesopotamia (Tello, Diyala, Larsa, Ur, even Susa; for Old Babylonian examples, see Delougaz 1952, 149, pls. 124–5). A wonderful example (Fig. 19.9), now in the Louvre Museum, depicts a frontal naked and winged goddess (tiara) with raised hands, often identified with Ishtar, accompanied by fish (lower register) and geese (upper register), a bull and a turtle.<sup>25</sup> This vase likely played a function in ritual, but it also had a connection to the ‘goose goddess’. Further, it suggests that the fragmentary vases, where only the image of geese is preserved, may have represented the same goddess as the Louvre vase.

## Conclusions

A substantial amount of representations of *Anatidae* can be found in Mesopotamia, especially between the end of the third and the beginning of the second millennium BC. Most depict geese, a few ducks, but none clearly show swans. Birds were not a purely decorative motif: their significance is strictly related to the scene of which they are a part, and only individual analysis



**Figure 19.9.** *Incised and painted vase from Larsa; AO 17000, Department of Near Eastern Antiquities. The Louvre © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY 2.5.*

of each object can help us understand why a bird was represented, be that either magic, cultic or apotropaic. The context of discovery can help. Only a small part of the objects representing geese has a known context

of discovery. But even if data are few, they can be analysed to better understand the functions of these objects. Most often they were found in houses or in temples, sometimes in palaces. Therefore, they are present everywhere, in all socio-economic levels of society. Two Lagash tablets with an impression of a seal of the goose goddess (Fisher 1997) show that this type of seal was actually in use. It is possible to exclude a purely magical, apotropaic or ornamental function: an apotropaic function can go hand in hand with an economic and social function. It would therefore be too simplistic to assume that the same image always has the same function(s). This kind of generalization, which perhaps has a calming, analgesic value for today's researcher taken by the desire to explain everything, leads to simplifying the complex reality of the past. And it opacifies the beauty of research, which resides precisely in this complexity of meanings.

#### Notes

- 1 For the epic on Anzu, see Annus 2001; see also Veldhuis 2004, 30–8. For the iconographic analysis of Anzu, see Fuhr-Jaepfelt 1972; Marchetti 1996. For the goose goddess, see Battini 2006a.
- 2 No identification has been attempted with shelducks which, although belonging to the same family of ducks, are more similar to geese (Etchecopar & Hue 1970, 107–8).
- 3 In Egypt, the presence of colours and the larger dimensions of representations of birds (Houlihan & Goodman 1986; Bailleul-LeSuer & Ressman 2012) allow for more precise identification.
- 4 For ducks, see Salonen 1973, 288–9; CAD P, 222a–224a (ducks, ducklings, duck eggs). For *kurukkum* as a kind of duck, see Black & al-Rawi 1987, 119. The meaning for *paspasu* and *kurkû* is still debated (Tarasewicz 2009, 152).
- 5 For geese, see Salonen 1973, 216–22; CAD K, 561b–563a.
- 6 Even the mallard duck can fly at such a speed if it is in escape flight.
- 7 This characteristic was used by humans as a warning sign since antiquity: under the Romans, in the Capitolium and until today in South Vietnam, where geese were used to guard the parked aircraft during the night.
- 8 'He went fowling without a bird trap. He caught nothing' (Lambert 1960, 230). For the connection between proverbs and the goddess Nanshe and birds, see Velhuis 2004, 96–8.
- 9 'A duck which is not eaten at the right time' (Lambert 1960, 238). Salonen (1973, 289) quotes the Sumerian proverb 'Tigris is a duck, Euphrates is a goose; the king may not approach them, otherwise his hand will...'
- 10 One pair is depicted in most examples (Ziegler 1962, 128 and 129; McCown *et al.* 1967, pl. 143.12; Barrelet 1968, nos. 116, 119, 120; Woolley & Mallowan 1976, nos. 210–214, 231; Cholidis 1992, pl. 13, no. 27; Wrede 2003, nos. 1268 and 1269). The motif of tree pairs is less frequent (e.g. Woolley & Mallowan 1976, no. 209).

- 11 Collins (2017, 86) suggests that any representation of animals is linked to the supernatural world. This was also the idea of many other scholars, some of them linking more strictly an animal to a divinity (e.g. van Buren 1939; Opificius 1961; Collon 1989; Groneberg 2000; Veldhuis 2004). I side with Amiet (1956), who proposed not to link the animal to a specific deity but rather to a function (fertility, protection, war) (Battini 2006a). For the study of animal symbolism, see also Watanabe 2002.
- 12 Before being linked to Ishara, and probably even after, scorpions have been connected with sexual intercourse (cf. van Buren 1937, 1–2, 12–18; Teissier 1984, 11; Bergamini 1987, 44; Mazzoni 1992, 35–43; 2002, 367. See lately Battini 2006b with references therein).
- 13 Magic texts often advise the use of certain stones (and many seals are made of precious and imported stones). In the myth of the fight of the gods against a kind of dragon, which infests and terrorizes the earth, a god succeeds in defeating and killing the dragon by holding before its face, as protection, his seal which is called *kunukku napishtishu*, the ‘seal of his life’ (Cassin 1960, note 6).
- 14 According to breeders, the three conditions for geese and ducks to stay in place are: safety, enough to eat, and a body of water (Etchecopar & Hue 1970, 106–7).
- 15 Unfortunately, I could not see this terracotta in Philadelphia and the only photo is in black and white, so it is difficult to discern the colour. The object was a gift, in 1900, from Hermann Hilprecht after the Babylonian Expedition to Nippur.
- 16 Pennsylvania Museum 31–43–319, 331–43–320, 31–43–321 and 31–43–323; 31–43–319 = frit, ‘duck or goose’, pierced through horizontally from side to side to side, 2.5 × 2.1 (h) cm, Ur III. 331–43–320 = frit, ‘duck or goose’, pierced through back vertically, 1.7 × 2 (h) cm, Ur III. 331–43–321 = frit, ‘duck or goose’, pierced through back vertically, 1.8 × 1.8 (h) cm, Ur III. The case of n. 331–43–323 (= glazed frit, ‘dove’, without hole, 3.2 × 2.3 (h) cm,) is different for the absence of a hole. I cannot clearly recognize whether it is a dove, a duck or a goose. See also SAA 7, 85: ii 7 ‘a goose head in lapis lazuli’.
- 17 For example, in Egypt and on the Levantine coast, duck-shaped make-up boxes with their heads twisted to watch their tails are very common (cf. Adler 1996). Still in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, boxes of this type were produced in France by Fondica.
- 18 I thank Pierre Villard for this translation (CT 55, 712–713).
- 19 For the four coroplastic variants, see Battini 2006a.
- 20 For example, Woolley 1926, 375; 1976, 56, 178; Legrain 1930, 28; van Buren 1930, li; 1939, 94; Frankfort 1939, 109, 130; and Collon 1982, 138 identify her with Baba. Even if less certain, this identification is not ruled out by Moorey (1975, 87) and Wiseman (1960, 169 and note 35). The identification with Gula, proposed by Ward was followed by Parrot (1948, 239), Wiseman (1960, 169 and note 35) and Moorey (1975, 87). The identification with Ningal (Legrain 1951, 27; Cholidis 1992, 70–6, 109–110) remains marginal. For an identification with Nanshe, see van Buren 1938, 74.
- 21 A new hypothesis proposed by Battini 2006a is based on those elements that accompany the goddess apart from the geese, and is not based on the textual information.
- 22 A literary text without a precise date, ‘The Debate between Fish and Bird’, ends in favour of the bird, because it can sing in the temple, thus making the gods rejoice, and it can be eaten in the great banquets (Sharlach 2017, 198).
- 23 *Iššūru* can also indicate a ritual vessel (CAD I, 213b).
- 24 Delougaz 1952, 43–44, pls. 25a, 27 (Jemdet Nasr), 93, pl. 94a (Early Dynastic). Wilson 2012, 80, pls. 38–40 (Ur III period).
- 25 Louvre, AO 17 000. H. 26.2 cm, diameter 13.5 cm. Paint and incised. Found in tomb 15 at Larsa in 1933 by A. Parrot.

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## Fierce lions, angry mice and fat-tailed sheep

Animals have always been an integral part of human existence. In the ancient Near East, this is evident in the record of excavated assemblages of faunal remains, iconography and – for the later historical periods – texts. Animals have predominantly been examined as part of consumption and economy, and while these are important aspects of society in the ancient Near East, the relationships between humans and animals were extremely varied and complex.

Domesticated animals had great impact on social, political and economic structures – for example cattle in agriculture and diet, or donkeys and horses in transport, trade and war. Fantastic mythological beasts such as lion-headed eagles or Anzu-birds in Mesopotamia or Egyptian deities such as the falcon-headed god Horus were part of religious beliefs and myths, while exotic creatures such as lions were part of elite symboling from the fourth millennium BC onward. In some cases, animals also intruded on human lives in unwanted ways by scavenging or entering the household; this especially applies to small or wild animals. But animals were also attributed agency with the ability to solve problems; the distinction between humans and other animals often blurs in ritual, personal and place names, fables and royal ideology. They were helpers, pets and companions in life and death, peace and war. An association with cult and mortuary practices involves sacrifice and feasting, while some animals held special symbolic significance.

This volume is a tribute to the animals of the ancient Near East (including Mesopotamia, Anatolia, the Levant and Egypt), from the fourth through first millennia BC, and their complex relationship with the environment and other human and nonhuman animals. Offering faunal, textual and iconographic studies, the contributions present a fascinating array of the many ways in which animals influence human life and death, and explore new perspectives in the exciting field of human-animal studies as applied to this part of the world.

### Editors:

*Laerke Recht* is Professor of Early Eastern Mediterranean Archaeology at the University of Graz, Austria, and a former Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the McDonald Institute of Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge. She is particularly interested in and has published on human–animal relations in the ancient Near East, Cyprus and Aegean.

*Christina Tsouparopoulou* is Assistant Professor in Near Eastern Archaeology at the Polish Academy of Sciences, Warsaw, Poland, Senior Research Associate and Marie Skłodowska-Curie Fellow at the McDonald Institute of Archaeological Research and Fellow of Wolfson College, Cambridge. She specializes in the material and textual culture of the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean in the third and second millennia BC.

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