



# Introduction: The Third Dimension and Animal Iconography in Archaeology

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Some of the earliest recognisable images created by humans depict animals (figure 1). Life and death, personal encounters, an engagement with the environment, religious beliefs, supernatural powers, ideology, status, technology and skill – these are just some of the aspects of human existence reflected in this iconography. The papers in this volume explore this specific type of material culture, addressing the ways in which humans have chosen to represent animals, and what these representations reveal about human-animal interaction.

This book can be seen as part of ‘the animal turn’ that has happened, both in archaeology and in academia more broadly, over the last few decades. That ‘turn’ is still happening, and still *needs* to happen (see e.g. Ritvo 2004 for an overview; for archaeology, see e.g. Kalof 2008; 2017; Boyd 2017; Recht 2019; and volume 4.2 of *World Archaeology*, 2010). It is most frequently considered within the interdisciplinary field of *Human-Animal Studies*, which spans the humanities and social and natural sciences, often including a concern with modern animal welfare. This focus on animals goes beyond simply acknowledging that they are important; that they are part of every aspect of human lifeways. It involves understanding animals as social actors that actively engage with humans in a myriad of ways, in encounters that range from friendly through apathetic to outright hostile. These interactions are directly and indirectly captured in animal iconography, which forms the basis of the papers presented here.



**Figure 1.** Hunting scene from cave at Sulawesi (Indonesia), dated to at least 43.9 ka (see also Aubert *et al.* 2019). Photo courtesy of Ratno Sardi.

The iconography itself takes many forms, and here we encounter a wonderful range: rock art, figurines, plaques, masks, zoomorphic vessels, decorated tools and weapons, equine tack, and even the manipulation of faunal remains to create a very specific symbolic image. Today, we would refer to many of these forms as ‘art’, although the concept may not correspond to the perceptions of the past. Be that as it may, the objects and finds discussed in the papers of this volume all have a beyond-purely-practical iconographic aspect. This aspect, and what it reveals about social networks, technology, ideology, religion, identity, and human-animal relations, is what the papers explore.

While three-dimensionality may in the first instance refer to objects in the round (figure 2), all of the finds in this volume are in fact physically three-dimensional. They are also material entities, and their materiality implies embodied experiences. The visual impact of a given find is determined by a variety of factors, such as colour, sheen, translucency, light and movement. But the interaction involves much more than sight – texture, temperature, weight, size, smell, and potentially even taste and hearing were part of the physical engagement with these iconographic objects. How, when and where a find is encountered is and was crucial to our experience of it.



**Figure 2.** 3D models of Early Cypriot (ca. 2250–2000 BCE) vessels. Unknown provenance, Pierides Museum. Photographs by K. Zeman-Wiśniewska, 3D modelling by M. Wiśniewski.

Certain themes are shared by several of the papers presented here. Perhaps one of the most pervasive is a concern with how and to what extent we can correctly and precisely identify animal species, and to what extent they correspond to modern Linnaean classifications. At some level, all of the authors engage with this question, but especially Tõnno Jonuks, who compares our modern systems to folk taxonomies and successfully demonstrates that caution is in order before assuming that the two can be directly mapped onto each other. Communities around the world and throughout history categorise the world in which they live, and these categorisations are rarely exactly the same as the current Western system. In some cases, the concept of ‘animal’ itself may not even exist. Among the Malawi studied by Brian Morris, for example, the world is not classified according to human, animal and plant, but rather divided between things that have ‘life’ and things that do not – those that do include entities such as trees, serpent spirits, souls of the dead, edible mushrooms, rain, birds and soil (Morris 2000: 140–141). For the ancient Greeks and Romans, Jeremy Mynott has also noted, on the basis of a study of ancient texts, that the



natural world did not stand in contrast to, but rather *included* humans (2018: 5). Witness also the ambiguity present in the English language, where ‘animal’ can mean all living, breathing beings, as distinct from plants, but can also refer more specifically to mammals, as opposed to birds, reptiles, fish and insects. This ambiguity reveals a great deal about our perception of the world: it hints at a hierarchy in which mammals are placed at the forefront.

As the examples above show (and there are many others like them), categories easily transcend contemporary Western boundaries, including those of the physical world. Jonuks argues that in the folk taxonomy of the Eastern Baltic in the Late Iron Age, animal categories included supernatural and hybrid beings. A similar hybridity, blurring of boundaries and play with bodies are echoed in the objects studied by Joanna M. Lawrence, where humans, oxen, helmets, lyres and ships morph into one another, and those studied by Evangelia Voulgari and Katarzyna Zeman-Wiśniewska, where the plasticity of the material adds to the free shaping and imaginative input of the craftsperson.

These material and bodily entanglements challenge us to reconsider our Linnaean and Cartesian divisions of body and mind, material and organic, human and animal, supernatural, sacred and profane. Bodies in the broadest sense are highly malleable and dynamic. We are reminded here of various creation myths where human bodies are created using clay – in a Sumerian version, a figurine was first made using clay mixed with the blood of a deity. The creation and manipulation of bodies and body-shapes thus entails a degree of power, which is also apparent in the interaction with the ‘finished’ object.

A separate theme related to the identification of animal species, and of continued importance in iconographic studies, is the question of reality. Art is never reality; it is always a *re*-presentation. That *re*-presentation may *reflect* reality, or it may reflect the imagination of its creator, and we face some challenges when attempting to separate the two. This does not mean that we are at a total loss. As mentioned above, for example, the finds all have a materiality which is tangible, despite and because of the craftsperson’s efforts. Just as significant is the fact that all iconography (or art) is situated, socially, ideologically, geographically and chronologically. This situatedness is what allows us to discuss and draw out the conclusions reached in each of the papers. Nicola Scheyhing skilfully draws this out in her paper on Halaf-period animal figurines, showing how iconography can help us to understand and decipher shifts in human lifeways, and how specific animal species may have forced such shifts.

In a practical sense, the identification of species, and of details of physical attributes, decoration, wear and so on, can be hampered by incomplete experiences of an object. That is, the materiality and complete three-dimensionality of an object may be crucial to its interpretation. Traditional printed publications do not allow for embodied experiences, and even museum displays often provide limited views, and no access beyond sight. These issues are not easily resolved if we want to maintain the integrity of past material culture, but as Katarzyna Zeman-Wiśniewska shows, 3D-modelling provides an excellent and fairly low-cost solution, at least to the problem of visualising finds.

While a craftsperson may produce impressive and imaginative displays of fantastic creatures on such finds, we know not to take this at face value and conclude that, at that time and place, dragons and unicorns were commonly found. However, the details are revealing: if the dragon is depicted with long claws and a scaly body, we may be fairly safe in assuming that this is because claws and scales were familiar concepts. If the unicorn is accurately rendered as a horse with a horn, it is likely that both horses and horned animals

were familiar. It is thus possible to derive information concerning technology, ancient zoological knowledge and human-animal interaction, among other things, through the careful analysis of images. This is wonderfully demonstrated in the paper by Lucia Alberti and Giambattista Bello, in which the collaboration between archaeology and marine biology offers a new dimension to Minoan encounters with – and depictions of – octopuses. It is also the strategy used by Lonneke Delpeut in her discussion of horses and chariots in ancient Egypt, from which we learn much about ancient knowledge of horses, and the methods used to communicate with them.

Delpeut's paper brings up another theme: the negotiation, expression and display of *status*. The use of animals and animal imagery to convey identity and social status is prolific. The papers here make a strong case for the widespread association of horses (and chariots) with prestige. Besides ancient Egypt in the second millennium BCE (Delpeut), we also see this use of animal iconography in Eurasia in the same period (Emma Usmanova, Olga Gumirova, Igor Chechushkov), and in the Scythian Pazyryk burials of Siberia in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE (Anna-Elisa Stümpel).

As is common for human burials, the placement and treatment of the body, along with personal belongings and offerings, and the construction of the tomb, are deliberately arranged by the living. Whether or not this reflects the reality of the life of the deceased, the dead can be attributed a certain identity and social role based on these factors. Wealthy and potentially high status individuals are typically recognised in the archaeological (mortuary) record in this manner, as are individuals identified as warriors. Animals take their part in these mortuary records in a number of ways. Skin and skeletal-based jewellery may clothe the deceased, meat and dairy products may be offered in vessels, complete animals may be sacrificed and animal imagery may decorate any surface or object. One animal in particular has a long history of being associated with power, strength and royalty: the lion. This is taken up by Nathalie Del Socorro in her paper on the use of lion iconography in Macedonia in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE.

It is not just the identity of humans that is at stake here. There are two cases in this volume of animals – again horses – being treated in a manner similar to humans in the mortuary record. In the Pazyryk burials, the social status of each horse was marked with individual gear and iconography, apparently based on their age and experience (Stümpel), while the Novoil'inovskiy 2 burial in Kazakhstan reveals the agency assigned to animals. The horses were carefully placed in a team at their most stunning, in the full 'flying gallop' (Usmanova, Gumirova, Chechushkov). The animals here take centre stage, even if the display is a human creation. Even more intriguing are exactly those concepts of display and staging at play here. The iconography is *composed of* faunal remains and material culture, rather than existing as images *imparted on* them. This is, in a sense, a static theatrical exhibition, frozen in time and perhaps not (only) intended for human viewing.

In life, however, animals are highly mobile. They, and their depictions, travel both locally and across distances that can include several continents. Tracing the movement of (the iconography of) specific animals can be very rewarding when it comes to understanding both the transfer of ideas and human relations to the environment. Zeman-Wiśniewska, for example, discusses the engagement of the people of ancient Cyprus with particular migratory birds, animals which also functioned as keepers of time and the seasons, while another long-distance journey and the direct and indirect exchange network between the Aegean, Egypt, Near East and the Indus Valley are illustrated in Marie Nicole

Pareja's paper. Here, the power of exoticism is exploited in the iconography of the monkey, which may have had connotations of religion, healing and entertainment.

Moving north, we can note some of the expressions of human-animal co-habitation. Cattle had a strong impact on transformations in lifeways in Bronze Age Scandinavia, and images of horns became integrated in the symbolism of rock art and other items of material culture (Lawrence). A more traditional and long-lived companion is the dog, although the dog-human relationship was, in the past, more complex than such tradition suggests. Branka Franicevic offers an integrated study, using both material culture and faunal remains to examine sacred and alimentary interactions and associations.

The importance of animals in all aspects of our lives means that the study of human-animal relations, both today and in the past, is an extremely relevant one. The papers in this volume take us on a journey through time and space, demonstrating exactly this relevance. Arranged in a roughly chronological order, we start in the Neolithic and end in the Medieval period. Moving across sea, sky and earth, from the Mediterranean and Near East through Siberia and the Baltic to Northern Europe and Great Britain, we are privileged with the most extraordinary travel companions: lions, horses, dogs, monkeys, birds, dragons, cattle, griffins and octopuses, among many other wonderful and fantastic creatures.

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