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Iconographic Similarities Between Permian “Goddess Plaques” (Ural Region, 7-8th Centuries CE) and Horus *Cippi* (Egypt, 8th Century BCE - 2nd Century CE)

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Abstract. The iconography of the Horus *cippus*, an amulet popular in Egypt from the late Third Intermediate Period to Roman times (8th century BCE - 2nd century CE), is unexpectedly recapitulated in bronze “goddess plaques” of the 7-8th centuries CE made by Permian peoples – Finno-Ugric groups from the Ural region of northern Eurasia. The likely explanation is that both templates are descendants of the widely-diffused “Master of Animals” motif, which originated in Mesopotamia during the Ubaid period (6-5th millennium BCE). Transfer of the Master/Mistress of Animals motif from the Near East to the Ural region probably occurred via the Scythians of the 1st millennium BCE.

Keywords: Permian Animal Style; Perm Bronzes; Horus *Cippus*; Master of Animals; Mistress of Animals.

[es] Similitudes iconográficas entre las “placas de divinidades” permias (región de los Urales, siglos VII-VIII d.C.) y los *cippi* de Horus (Egipto, siglos VIII a.C. - II d.C.)

Resumen. La iconografía del *cippus* de Horus, un amuleto popular en Egipto desde finales del Tercer Período Intermedio hasta la Época Romana (siglo VIII a. C. - siglo II d. C.), se recapitula inesperadamente en “placas de diosas” de bronce de los siglos VII a VIII d. C. hechas por los pueblos permios – grupos ugro-finés de la región de los Urales del norte de Eurasia. La explicación probable es que ambos modelos son descendientes del motivo ampliamente difundido “Señor de los Animales”, que se originó en Mesopotamia durante el período Ubaid (VI-V milenio a. C.). La transferencia del motivo Señor/Señora de los Animales del Próximo Oriente a la región de los Urales probablemente se realizó a través de los escitas del I milenio a. C.

Palabras clave: Estilo animal permio; bronce permios; *cippus* de Horus; Señor de los Animales; Señora de los Animales.

Summary. 1. Introduction. 2. Master of Animals. 3. Permian animal art. 4. Visual overlaps. 5. A cultural conduit. 6. Literature on Permian art. 7. A break in transmission? 8. Local meaning. 9. Other influences. 10. Conclusion. 11. Written Sources and Bibliographical References.

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1. Introduction

The “Master of Animals” motif, which originated in Mesopotamia in the 6-5th millennium BCE, diffused widely in the course of subsequent millennia², spawning derivative forms in Egypt, the Ancient Near East, the Mediterranean world and beyond. This paper identifies a motif in the animal art of the Western Eurasian steppe from the 1st millennium CE, namely Permian bronze “goddess plaques”, that is particularly close to a popular Egyptian embodiment of the Master of Animals known as the Horus *cippus*.

2. Master of Animals

The Master of Animals motif, which originated in Mesopotamia during the Ubaid period (5700-4000 BCE)³, became common on stamp and cylinder seals from the Ancient Near East (e.g., Fig. 1). It also appeared in Predynastic Egypt, most notably on the Gebel el-Arak knife handle (Naqada II/III, ca. 3300-3200 BCE) (Fig. 2)⁴, and on a stone vessel from Iran (2600-2400 BCE)⁵. Additionally, it is found on some Minoan artifacts (1700-1300 BCE)⁶.

In Egypt of the 2nd and 1st millennia BCE, the Master of Animals motif clearly underpinned some depictions of the dwarf-god Bes⁷ and the well-known iconography of the magical Horus *cippus*⁸, in which the Horus figure –Horus-the-

² Cultural and artistic transfer is the byproduct of complex processes of inter-connectivity, receptivity and entanglement arising from trade, diplomacy, warfare, seasonal migration and small- and large-scale resettlements. Moreover, motifs travel differently in/between sedentary communities and nomadic ones. Detailed analyses of such mechanisms are beyond the scope of this paper, which merely seeks to establish proof-of-principle for one proposed transmission based on the incomplete evidence that survives today.

³ Petr Charvát, *Mesopotamia Before History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 63; Jennifer C. Ross, “Art’s Role in the Origins of Writing: The Seal-Carver, the Scribe, and the Earliest Lexical Texts”, in *Critical Approaches to Ancient Near Eastern Art*, eds. Brian A. Brown and Marian H. Feldman (Boston and Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 304; “Cachet plat: Représentation du Maître des Animaux”, Louvre, AO 15388, accessed April 14, 2020, http://cartelfr.louvre.fr/cartelfr/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=9775&langue=fr

⁴ Marc Étienne, “Dagger from Gebel el-Arak”, Louvre, E 11517, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/dagger-gebel-el-arak>

⁵ Joan Aruz, “Cylindrical Vessel with Heroes and Animals”, in *Art of the First Cities: The Third Millennium B.C. from the Mediterranean to the Indus*, eds. Joan Aruz and Ronald Wallenfels (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2003), 330-32.

⁶ “Pendant”, British Museum, 1892.0520.8, accessed April 14, 2020, https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=462051&partId=1&searchText=1892.0520.8&images=true&page=1; “Cylinder Seal and Modern Impression: Master of Animals between Lions, Griffins, Minoan Genius”, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1999.325.223, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/327819>

⁷ Veronica Wilson, “The Iconography of Bes with Particular Reference to the Cypriot Evidence”, *Levant* 7, no. 1 (1975): 83, 88, 92 and 94-100; Veronique Dasen, *Dwarfs in Ancient Egypt and Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 61 and 65. Like the Master of Animals motif, Bes himself went on to enjoy a “globalised” dissemination throughout the ancient world; Adrienn Orosz, “Scenes with Two Bes Figures from Nimrud and the Second Step of Bes Toward Globalisation”, in *Esoteric Knowledge in Antiquity*, eds. Klaus Geus and Mark Geller (Berlin: Max Planck Institute for the History of Science, 2014), 21-36, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/Preprints/P454.PDF>

⁸ Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 2008), 224, including fn. 1041; Scott B. Noegel, “From Ape to Zebra: On Wild Animals and Taxonomy in Ancient Israel”, in *Animals and their Relation to Gods, Humans and Things in the Ancient World*, eds. Raija Mattila, Sanae Ito and Sebastian Fink (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2019), 114; Marie-

child, or Harpokrates in Greek⁹– is actually surmounted by the face of Bes (Fig. 3)¹⁰.



Figure 1. Cylinder-seal of Ishma-Ilum, prince of Kisik, Mesopotamia; lapis lazuli, ca. 2500 BCE. The seal itself is at left and a modern rolling/impression from it at right; the latter reveals a naked hero mastering two lions. Louvre AO 22299. Source: © RMN-Grand Palais, Christian Larrieu; and Philippe Beaujard, *The Worlds of the Indian Ocean: A Global History. From the Fourth Millennium BCE to the Sixth Century CE* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 1: Plate section 2, Illustration IIa.



Figure 2. Gebel el-Arak knife handle, Egypt; ivory, 3300-3200 BCE. A hero in Mesopotamian costume masters two lions. Louvre, E 11517. Source: Rama, “Gebel el Arak Knife”, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0 FR.

Astrid Calmettes, “La Imagen de Horus sobre los Cocodrilos y el Simbolismo de la Serpiente”, *Nilus – Butlletí de la Societat Catalana d’Egiptologia* 3 (1994): 7-13.

⁹ *Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, s.v. “Horus – 1. Horus the Child”, by George Hart.

¹⁰ Recent opinion has come to regard the face of Bes atop the Horus cippus as a mask; Annie Gasse, “Stèles d’Horus sur les Crocodiles” (Paris: Louvre, 2004), 18 and 102; Heike Sternberg-el Hotabi, *Untersuchungen zur Überlieferungsgeschichte der Horusstelen: Ein Beitrag zur Religionsgeschichte Ägyptens im 1. Jahrtausend v. Chr.*, *Ägyptologische Abhandlungen* 62 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999), 1: 9-10 and 1: 87. Whether mask, face or head, the rationale for its inclusion is that the god’s visage protects Horus.



Figure 3. Horus *cippus*, Egypt; steatite, 3rd century BCE. Horus-the-child stands naked on two crocodiles grasping animals (snakes, scorpions, lion, gazelle), flanked by avian standards (Horus-falcon, feather) and surmounted by the head of the dwarf-god Bes. Source: Brooklyn Museum, 60.73, “Cippus of Horus on the Crocodiles”, CC-BY.

That Horus is shown standing on the back of a fierce animal not only demonstrates his power over such beasts but also accords with the visual convention for deities of the ancient Near East¹¹. The Horus *cippus* remained a popular apotropaic and/or curative aid in Egypt from the late Third Intermediate Period to the Roman Period (8th century BCE - 2nd century CE)¹²; in particular, drinking water that had been poured over a *cippus* was believed to heal the sting or bite of a noxious animal¹³. Most Horus *cippi* took the form of small portable

¹¹ Paul Y. Hoskisson, “Aaron’s Golden Calf”, *FARMS Review* 18, no. 1 (2006): 380. The *cippus* scheme typically has Horus standing on two animals, an innovation perhaps anticipated by the composition on the Gebel el-Arak knife handle (Fig. 2).

¹² “Horus Stelae”, University College London, published 2003, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/museums-static/digitalegypt/art/horusstelae.html>; *British Museum Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, s.v. “Horus” by Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson. Originally the *cippi* depicted a young saviour-god named Shed, who was later identified with Horus-the-Child. For Shed, see *Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*, s.v. “Shed”, by George Hart.

¹³ Marina Escolano-Poveda, “Ancient Egyptian Amulets: Cippus”, Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum, accessed April 14, 2020, <http://archaeologicalmuseum.jhu.edu/the-collection/object-stories/ancient-egyptian-amulets/cippus/>; Åsa Strandberg, *The Gazelle in Ancient Egyptian Art: Image and Meaning* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2009), 141, accessed April 14, 2020, <http://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:232265/FULLTEXT01.pdf>

amulets¹⁴. Over time, the iconographic scheme of the *cippus* diffused back into the Ancient Near East, where it underpinned the imagery of Lamashtu amulets (1st millennium BCE). In this Mesopotamian adaptation, the destructive demoness Lamashtu took the place of Horus and the protective demon Pazuzu replaced Bes (Figs. 4-5)¹⁵.



Figure 4. Lamashtu amulet, neo-Assyrian; bronze, ca. 910-610 BCE. Louvre, AO 22205. The feared demoness Lamashtu is the central figure in the bottom two registers, while the head of the protective demon Pazuzu peers over the top of the plaque. Source: Rama, “Lamashtu plaque 9167”, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.0 FR.

¹⁴ University College London, “Horus Stelae”.

¹⁵ Eva Götting, “Arcane Art: Some Thoughts on the Perception of the Magico-Religious Imagery of Lamashtu-Amulets”, in *Proceedings of the 10th International Congress on the Archaeology of the Ancient Near East*, eds. Barbara Horejs et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2018), 1: 455-66; Oskar Kaelin, “Pazuzu, Lamaschtu-Reliefs und Horus-Stelen: Ägypten als Modell im 1. Jt. v. Chr.”, in *Images as Sources: Studies on Ancient Near Eastern Artefacts and the Bible Inspired by the Work of Othmar Keel*, eds. Susanne Bickel et al. (Fribourg and Göttingen: Academic Press and Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 365-78. The plaque shown in Fig. 4 is described by Marie-José Castor, “Plaque for Protection Against the Female Demon Lamashtu”, Louvre, AO 22205, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/plaque-protection-against-female-demon-lamashtu>. The plaque shown in Fig. 5a is described in “Miniature Cippus (Magical Stela) with Horus in Profile Wearing Gazelle Head on the Forehead”, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 57.143, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/545378>

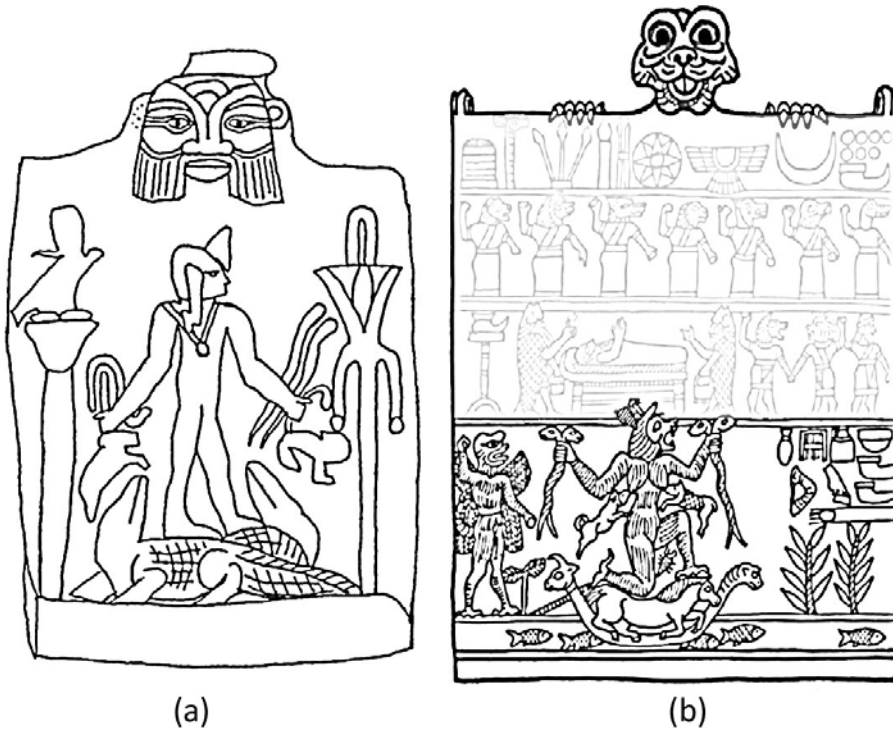


Figure 5. Drawings comparing (a) a Horus *cippus* (Egypt, 3rd Intermediate or Late Period, 712-332 BCE, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 57.143, with (b) the Lamashu plaque shown in Figure 4. In the latter, iconography without a counterpart in the *cippus* panel has been de-emphasized (registers 1-3). Source for (a): Drawing after James P. Allen, *The Art of Medicine in Ancient Egypt* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2005), 63-64, and Nick West, "Gods on Small Things: Egyptian Monumental Iconography on Late Antique Magical Gems and the Greek and Demotic Magical Papyri", *Pallas* 86 (2011): 155 (Fig. 1b). Source for (b): Drawing after S. Beaulieu, reproduced in Samantha C. Sinclair, "The Lament of Lamaštu: Biography of a Near Eastern Dark Goddess", 23.

Lamashtu amulets were popular in northern Mesopotamia and beyond; examples have been found in Anatolia¹⁶. In Egypt of the 1st century CE, the frontal image of Horus-the-child was replaced by his figure in profile, and hieroglyphic inscriptions were dropped in favour of short incantations in Greek¹⁷. With the arrival of Christianity in Egypt, the healing Horus imagery infiltrated the Coptic world; a template derived from that of the *cippus* is found on the pilgrim ampoules of the Egyptian martyr and wonder-worker, St. Menas (4-7th centuries CE) (Fig. 6)¹⁸.

¹⁶ Eva Götting, "Exportschlager Dämon? Zur Verbreitung altorientalischer Lamaštu-Amulette", in *Exportschlager-Kultureller Austausch, wirtschaftliche Beziehungen und transnationale Entwicklungen in der antiken Welt*, eds. Janina Göbel and Tanja Zech (Munich: Herbert Utz Verlag, 2011), 437-56.

¹⁷ University College London, "Horus Stelae".

¹⁸ Grzegorz First, "The Horus *Cippus* from National Museum in Poznań", *Folia Orientalia* 50 (2013): 330; Christian Cannuyer, "Saint Mina aux Chameaux: Autour des Origines d'un Iconotype copte", *Le Monde copte*



Figure 6. St. Menas pilgrim flasks, Egypt; terracotta, 6-7th centuries CE. St. Menas is shown in an attitude of prayer between two camels. (a) Louvre, E 24445. (b) Louvre, MN 1469. The vertical snakes in Horus's hands on the *cippus* have morphed into a cloak hem in panel (a), while the crocodiles/quadrupeds on the *cippus* have become kneeling camels (both panels). Source for (a): Christiane Lyon-Caen, "Pilgrim flasks", Louvre, E 24445; © Musée du Louvre, G. Poncet. Source for (b): Marie-Lan Nguyen, "Pilgrim Flask St. Menas", Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 3.0.

In the meantime, the Master of Animals motif had continued to diffuse widely outside of Egypt, reaching as far afield as north-western Europe¹⁹. In addition to featuring on cylinder seals from the neo-Assyrian empire (9-7th century BCE)²⁰ and Achaemenid Persia (5th century BCE)²¹, the motif appears in Luristan bronzes (e.g.,

27-28 (1997): 139-54. The flask shown in Fig. 6a is described by Christiane Lyon-Caen, "Pilgrim flasks", Louvre, E 24445, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/pilgrim-flasks>. The flask shown in Fig. 6b is described in Louvre, "Ampoule à Eulogie: Saint Méнас", Louvre, MN 1469, accessed April 14, 2020, http://cartelen.louvre.fr/cartelen/visite?srv=car_not_frame&idNotice=20734

¹⁹ Bettina Arnold and Derek B. Counts, "Prolegomenon: The Many Masks of the Master of Animals", in *The Master of Animals in Old World Iconography*, eds. Derek B. Counts and Bettina Arnold, (Budapest: Archaeolingua Foundation, 2010), 13.

²⁰ H. Föll, "Master of Animals", accessed April 14, 2020, https://www.tf.uni-kiel.de/matwis/amat/iss/kap_b/advanced/ab_1_2d.html

²¹ Christie's, Antiquities auction, 7 November, 2001, London, Lot 605; cited (with image) in Hjaltland Collection, "Cylinder Seal, Achaemenid, Modern Impression", Wikimedia Commons, published 2014, accessed April 14, 2020, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cylinder_Seal,_Achaemenid,_modern_impression_05.jpg

7th century BCE) and in Celtic metalwork (6-5th centuries BCE)²². Related imagery appears on the Gundestrup Cauldron, a silver vessel found in Denmark (2nd century BCE - 3rd century CE) (Fig. 7)²³, and the motif appears twice on the Sutton Hoo purse-lid, an artifact from Anglo-Saxon England (7th century CE, contemporary with the Permian bronze “goddess plaques”) (Fig. 8)²⁴.

The Master of Animals motif also diffused southward into Africa, where it was incorporated into the royal iconography of pre-colonial kingdoms in Nigeria, Cameroon and elsewhere²⁵. Examples of the motif can be seen in Yoruba ivories, the Benin bronzes of the Edo people (16-17th centuries CE) and wooden lintels carved for Bamileke kings²⁶.

3. Permian animal art

The Perm area lies in modern Russia and is part of the Ural region, which is considered a western part of the Eurasian steppe. The core settlements of the Permian cultural bloc lay to the west of the Ural Mountains but its scope also extended from the northeastern Ural Mountains to western Siberia²⁷. From the 3rd century BCE to the 13th century CE, it served as the homeland of several Finno-Ugric groups, such as the Zyrian Komis, Permian Komis, Ob-Ugrians and Udmurts, whose settlements were concentrated on the Kama, Komi and Volga Rivers²⁸. Permian metallurgy is known for its wealth of zoomorphic images. Permian animal art began in the Scythian/Sarmatian world at the beginning of the 1st millennium CE, and flourished after the great migrations of the 4-5th centuries CE²⁹. It reached its zenith in the 6-9th centuries CE and disappeared in the 14th century CE³⁰.

²² Föll, “Master of Animals”.

²³ “The Gundestrup Cauldron”, National Museum of Denmark, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://en.natmus.dk/historical-knowledge/denmark/prehistoric-period-until-1050-ad/the-early-iron-age/the-gundestrup-cauldron/>

²⁴ “Purse”, British Museum, 1939,1010.3, accessed April 14, 2020, https://research.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=87421&partId=1&searchText=1939,1010.3&images=true&page=1

²⁵ Théophile Obenga, “Le ‘Maître des Animaux.’ Du Mythe à l’Histoire – Paradigme culturel africain de l’Égypte des Pharaons à nos Jours”, *Ankh* 18-20 (2009-2011), 50-69, http://www.ankhonline.com/ankh_num_18_19_20/ankh_18_19_20_t_obenga_le%20maitre%20des%20animaux.pdf

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 56-58.

²⁷ Eero Autio, “The Permian Animal Style”, *Folklore* 18-19 (2001): 162, <http://dx.doi.org/10.7592/FEJF2001.18.permian>; Petya Andreeva, “Fantastic Beasts Of The Eurasian Steppes: Toward A Revisionist Approach To Animal-Style Art” (PhD, University of Pennsylvania, 2018), 264, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://repository.upenn.edu/edissertations/2963/>

²⁸ Autio, “Permian Animal Style”, 162; Andreeva, “Fantastic Beasts”, 264.

²⁹ Eero Autio, *Kotkat, Hirvet, Karhut: Permäläistä Pronssitaidetta* (Jyväskylä: Atena, 2000).

³⁰ Autio, “Permian Animal Style”, 162.



Figure 7. One of several Master of Animals plates from the exterior of the Gundestrup Cauldron, Denmark; silver, *ca.* 200 BCE - 300 CE. National Museum of Denmark; photo is actually detail of a replica in the National Archaeological Museum in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France. Source: Lionel Allorge, “Moulage par Galvanoplastie du Chaudron de Gundestrup”, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.



Figure 8. One of two Master of Animals motifs from the Sutton Hoo purse-lid, Suffolk; gold, 7th century CE. British Museum 1939,1010.3, detail.
Source: image AN35182001; © Trustees of the British Museum, CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

Permian bronzes have been recovered from cemeteries, settlements, places of sacrifice, strongholds, treasure caches, and caves³¹, with many finds coming from the graves of commoners³². Permian animal bronzes are the subject of a monograph in Finnish, published in 2000: Eero Autio's *Kotkat, Hirvet, Karhut – Permiläistä Pronssitaidetta* ["Eagles, Deer, Bears – Permian Bronze Casts"]³³. A distinctive – indeed, probably unique – feature of Permian animal style is the human-bird-elk hybrid called the *sulde*³⁴. Vera Ivanova claims that Permian animal plaques (as opposed to bronze bird or animal figurines) have been found only in settlements – mainly at cultic monuments, altars and sacred places³⁵. Within the plaque corpus, which consists of complex compositions of zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures, is the type of special interest here: the “goddess plaques” dominated by the frontal representation of a female anthropomorph surrounded by (or merged with) animals and/or birds. Most of the known examples date from the 7-8th centuries CE. There is general agreement amongst scholars that the figure must represent a goddess³⁶.

4. Visual overlaps

In view of the vast geographic range enjoyed by the Master of Animals motif, as outlined in Section 2, it should perhaps not come as a great surprise to find iconography derived from it on the Permian bronze “goddess plaques” introduced in the previous section. Three examples of these bronzes, which Harald Haarmann and Joan Marler term “Mistress of Nature” plaques³⁷, are shown in Figs. 9-11³⁸.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

³² Andreeva, “Fantastic Beasts”, 265.

³³ Autio, *Kotkat, Hirvet, Karhut*.

³⁴ Autio, “Permian Animal Style”, 162 and 163 (including Fig. 8).

³⁵ Vera Ivanova, “Perm Animal Style”, Russia-InfoCentre, published June 23, 2006, accessed April 14, 2020, http://russia-ic.com/culture_art/visual_arts/200/#.XpazFMgzaUk

³⁶ E.g., Autio, “Permian Animal Style”, 175-76; P. Andreeva, “Fantastic Beasts”, 266-71; “*Permskiy Zverinyy Stil' – Bogini'*”, Senator Publishing, published 2018, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.perm-animal-style.ru/photo/goddess/>; plus all of the H. Haarmann and J. Marler publications cited in this paper.

³⁷ Harald Haarmann and Joan Marler, *Introducing the Mythological Crescent: Ancient Beliefs and Imagery Connecting Eurasia with Anatolia* (Wiesbaden: Harrassovitz, 2008), 164-65 (Figs. 33-35); Harald Haarmann and Joan Marler, “The Unfolding of Old European Ritual Life: A Mesolithic Heritage”, *Journal of Archaeomythology* 7 (2011): 85 (including legend to Fig. 12); Harald Haarmann and Joan Marler, “The Goddess and the Bear”, *Journal of Archaeomythology* 3 (2007): 68-69 (including legends to Figs. 12-13).

³⁸ Figs. 9-10: The plaque shown in Fig. 9 is the same as that shown in E. Autio, *Kotkat, Hirvet, Karhut*, 63; H. Haarmann and J. Marler, “The Goddess and the Bear”, Fig. 13; H. Haarmann and J. Marler, *Mythological Crescent*, Fig. 34; and H. Haarmann and J. Marler, “Old European Ritual Life”, Fig. 12a. The plaque shown in Fig. 10 is the same as that shown in E. Autio, *Kotkat, Hirvet, Karhut*, 60, and H. Haarmann and J. Marler, *Mythological Crescent*, Fig. 43.



www.p-zs.ru

Figure 9. Permian “goddess plaque”, Ust-Kaib village, Cherdynsky district, Perm Krai, Russia; bronze, 161 x 67 mm, 7-8th centuries CE. Source: © Senator Publishing, Perm, used by kind permission; goddess 7 at “*Permskiy Zverinyy Stil' – Bogini*”, Senator Publishing, 2018.



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Figure 10. Permian “goddess plaque”, Cherdynsky district, Perm Krai, Russia; bronze, 157 x 75 mm, 7-8th centuries CE. Cherdynsky Museum of Local Lore 1927/1.

Source: © Senator Publishing, Perm, used by kind permission; goddess 8 at “*Permskiy Zverinyy Stil’ – Bogini*”, Senator Publishing, 2018.



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Figure 11. Permian “goddess plaque”, Cherdynsky district, Perm Krai, Russia; bronze, 164 x 70 mm, 7-8th centuries CE. Cherdynsky Museum of Local Lore 1927/4.

Source: © Senator Publishing, Perm, used by kind permission; goddess 6 at “*Permskiy Zverinyy Stil' – Bogini*”, Senator Publishing, 2018.

The gender shift is unremarkable; some of the Permian “goddess” figures look quite masculine³⁹, and in any case there are ancient examples where the

³⁹ Indeed, Belavin remarks that the anthropomorph in Permian plaques is most often male or lacks gender characteristics; A.M. Belavin, “*Ob Etnicheskoy Prindlezhnosti Permskogo Srednevekovogo Zverinogo*

anthropomorph who subdues the animals is female⁴⁰. These include depictions of Beset – the female counterpart of the dwarf-god Bes – on Egyptian ivory knives from the Middle Kingdom period (20-17th centuries BCE)⁴¹, and Egyptian(ized) depictions of the Semitic goddess Asherah from the New Kingdom period (ca. 14th-century BCE)⁴². In later times, the *Potnia Theron* was a Mistress of Animals motif in which the heroine became identified with the Greek goddess Artemis (Fig. 12)⁴³. Like the Permian goddess in Fig. 10, the *Potnia Theron* is often winged⁴⁴; examples of this kind include a Celtic pitcher adornment from Switzerland dating from the 6th century BCE (Fig. 13)⁴⁵.

The vertical juxtaposition of forward-staring heads on two of the Permian bronzes (Figs. 10-11) is particularly reminiscent of the placement of Bes' face above that of Horus in Egyptian *cippi* and of Pazuzu's head on Lamashtu amulets. Indeed, it is common in Permian examples for some sort of grotesque head(s) to appear above that of the forward-facing goddess (Figs. 9-11, and elsewhere⁴⁶). We might note in passing that the wearing of an animal-head headdress is not unique to Eurasian shamanism; on some *cippi*, not only is the head of Bes present but Horus wears a gazelle protome on his forehead (Fig. 5a)⁴⁷. In the Permian plaques, the long "sidelock of youth" of the Horus figure seems to be preserved in the prominent long hair strands/braids of the goddess, now symmetrically disposed on both sides of her face. The two vertical quadrupeds grasped by Horus in Fig. 3 have counterparts in the two vertical quadrupeds connected to the hands of the goddess in Fig. 11. They also have counterparts in the two vertical quadrupeds (rodents?) flanking the head of the goddess in Fig. 9⁴⁸; indeed, on closer examination, two vertical animal heads also seem to dangle directly from the hands of the goddess. In what may be a further instance of continuity with the ancient prototype, the tall avian standards flanking Horus in the *cippus* (one surmounted by a falcon, the other by a feather; Fig. 3) are replaced by long-necked birds in one of the Permian plaques (Fig. 9) and by diminutive humans atop the goddess's wings in another (Fig. 10). In Fig. 11 the left and right boundaries are provided by long vertical snakes, recapitulating the vertical snakes grasped by Horus (Fig. 3) and Lamashtu (Figs. 4 & 5b) in their respective amulets.

Stilya", *Proceedings of the Kama Archaeological and Ethnographic Expedition* 1-2 (2001): 17, <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/ob-etnicheskoy-prinadlezhnosti-permskogo-srednevekovogo-zverinogo-stilya>

⁴⁰ Arnold and Counts, "Prolegomenon", 10 and 20.

⁴¹ Hartwig Altenmüller, "Ein Zauberemesser des Mittleren Reiches", *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 13 (1986): 19-20; Ritner, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 224, including fn. 1041.

⁴² Susan Ackerman, "Goddesses", in *Near Eastern Archaeology: A Reader*, ed. Susan Richard (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 393 including Fig. 104.

⁴³ Nannó Marinatos, *The Goddess and the Warrior: The Naked Goddess and Mistress of Animals in Early Greek Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000).

⁴⁴ See, for example, the seven examples presented by Föll, "Master of Animals".

⁴⁵ Felix Müller and Geneviève Lüscher, *Die Kelten in der Schweiz* (Stuttgart: Theiss Verlag, 2004), 48.

⁴⁶ Haarmann and Marler, *Mythological Crescent*, Fig. 35.

⁴⁷ Strandberg, *The Gazelle in Ancient Egyptian Art*, 140-44; Metropolitan Museum of Art, "Miniature Cippus", 57.143.

⁴⁸ These rodent-like animals are ambiguous in that their ribbed bodies can also be read as bird's heads with large beaks (in which case the quadruped tails become bird crests).



Figure 12. Artemis Orthia as *Potnia Theron*, Sparta; ivory, Archaic period (8-5th centuries BCE). National Archaeological Museum, Athens. Source: Marsyas, “NAMA Artémis Orthia”, Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 2.5.

At the base of the plaques one often finds the goddess standing on two chthonic animals facing opposite directions⁴⁹ – for example, lizards/bears (Fig. 9)⁵⁰ or spiders (Fig. 10) – just as the *cippus* has Horus standing on the back of two crocodiles facing opposite directions. Sometimes there is only one mount for the standing goddess (e.g., the single lizard of Fig. 11), or the bodies of the two animals may fuse to form a single Janus-like creature (Fig. 9).

⁴⁹ Belavin, “*Eticheskoy*”, 17, observes that the mounts are always in profile.

⁵⁰ Autio, “Permian Animal Style”, 171 and 179-81, for lizards; Haarmann and Marler, “The Goddess and the Bear”, 69, for bears.



Figure 13. Winged Mistress of Animals on the Hydria of Grächwil, Switzerland; bronze, ca. 570 BCE. Historisches Museum, Bern. Source: Sailko, "Età del Ferro, Recipiente greco da Grächwil", Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0.

5. A cultural conduit

Although they have long been recognised as cultic items⁵¹, and Near Eastern or Iranian influences have been suspected since the early 1900s⁵², Permian bronzes have – as far as I am aware – not previously been linked with the Horus *cippus* or with the Mesopotamian Master of Animals motif that is presumably ancestral to both⁵³.

As mentioned in Section 3, Permian animal art began in the Scythian/Sarmatian region at the beginning of the 1st millennium CE, but its roots extend back to the 1st millennium BCE⁵⁴. The Scythians were a nomadic people of Iranian origin⁵⁵. Scythian art of the mid-1st millennium BCE drew upon the iconography of the Ancient Near East, reflecting the domination and occupation of Western Asia by the Scythians prior to their defeat by the Medes at the beginning of the 6th century BCE⁵⁶. As the nomadist M.I. Artamonov observed in an article published in Russian in 1968, “The return of the Scythians from Western Asia at the beginning of the 6th century was marked by a flooding of the Northern Black Sea Region with plots and forms of ancient [Near] Eastern origin, only partially reworked by Scythians in their own style”⁵⁷. In consequence, “Both the North Black Sea and Siberian art of animal style equally go back to the art of [culturally] Iranian tribes, which developed in the Near East on the basis of the ancient [Near] Eastern heritage. In the Northern Black Sea region, this art came still burdened with Mesopotamian-Urartian plots and forms”⁵⁸.

Artamonov did not make any specific mention the Master of Animals motif. However, given the existence of a cultural conduit linking the art of the Ancient Near East to that of northern Eurasia via Scythia, a visual template that was widespread throughout Greater Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean world – as the

⁵¹ Belavin, “*Etmicheskoy*”, 14-16.

⁵² A. Spitsyn, *Shamanskie Izobrazhenia* (Saint Petersburg: Russian Archaeological Society, 1906).

⁵³ For example, neither template is mentioned in Autio, “Permian Animal Style” or Belavin, “*Etmicheskoy*”, or Andreeva, “Fantastic Beasts”, nor in the various publications of Haarmann and Marler cited in the present paper.

⁵⁴ Belavin, “*Etmicheskoy*”, 20, says that “according to the almost unanimous opinion of the majority of researchers of the Pechora, West Siberian and Perm animal styles, all these styles grew up on a unified cultural and ideological basis, which was formed in the Urals in the 1st millennium BC” (author’s translation). However, he sees the traditions as purely indigenous to the region, and Permian art as Ugric in origin.

⁵⁵ *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. “Scythians” by Askold Ivantchik, accessed April 14, 2020, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/scythians>

⁵⁶ Artamonov, “*Proizhozhdeniya Skifskogo Iskusstva*”, *Sovetskaya Arhologiya* 4 (1968): 27-45, <http://kronk.spb.ru/library/artamonov-mi-1968.htm>. The current understanding of the Scythians’ role throughout the 7th century BCE is summarised as follows by Marc Van De Mieroop: “In 695, nomadic Cimmerian warriors overran Phrygia and sacked the capital Gordion. Together with another northern nomadic group, the Scythians, they caused great disruption in many parts of the Near East. Urartu and Assyria repeatedly engaged in battle against them or tried to keep them at bay through diplomacy, while, according to Herodotus, the Scythians temporarily dominated the Medes. Both the Cimmerians and the Scythians participated in the final defeat of Assyria and remained in Anatolia, although they never formed a state. The homeland of the Scythians seems to have been the region north of the Black Sea”; Marc Van De Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000–323 BC*. (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2016), 294. The final defeat of Assyria began with the sack of Nineveh by a combined force of Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians in 612 BCE; Van De Mieroop, *History of the Ancient Near East*, 285.

⁵⁷ Artamonov, “*Proizhozhdeniya Skifskogo Iskusstva*”, 42 (author’s translation).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 44 (author’s translation). For example, archaeological sites in the Dniepr region of the Northern Black Sea (e.g., Kelermes) have yielded artifacts with Urartian motifs; P. Andreeva, “Fantastic Beasts”, 303.

Master of Animals motif certainly was – could readily have made its way into the Permian art repertoire.

Luristan animal bronzes (*ca.* 1000-600 BCE) are a western Iranian art-form closely related to Scythian animal bronzes⁵⁹, not least because the Scythians occupied Luristan in the 8-7th centuries BCE⁶⁰. Notably, the head-over-head motif common to the Horus *cippus* (Fig. 3) and the Permian plaques (Figs. 9-11), as discussed in Section 4, is preserved in the Master of Animals corpus from Luristan (e.g., Fig. 14)⁶¹. The same concept probably underpins the Permian mask-on-chest ornament (compare Fig. 14 with Fig. 10). The *cippus* motif in which two animals facing opposite directions serve as mounts for the forward-facing anthropomorph (Fig. 3) is also preserved in some Master of Animals casts from Luristan (Fig. 15), just as it is in some Permian plaques (Fig. 9-10).

6. Literature on Permian art

A review of Autio's Finnish monograph on Permian bronzes identifies the "goddess plaques" as the highlight of the corpus: "Most interesting are three-part compositions, with bird or elk motif in the upper part, an anthropomorph in the middle, and in the bottom part a lizard, or more rarely, a fish or other zoomorphic image"⁶². Harald Haarmann and Joan Marler take what they call the "Mistress of Nature" anthropomorph to represent "a kind of collective personification of protective spirits" drawn from "the imagery and mythology of pre-agrarian Eurasia (which has continued into the historic era)"⁶³. As witnessed by Figs. 9 and 10, "She often has zoomorphic features, with arms like birds' wings, legs with bears' feet, hands like eagles' claws"⁶⁴. With the shift to farming in southern Eurasia, the southern embodiment of the Mistress of Nature is thought to have transformed into the Earth/Grain Mother⁶⁵.

⁵⁹ *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Bronzes of Luristan" by Oscar W. Muscarella, accessed April 14, 2020, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/bronzes-of-luristan>. Luristan, which encompasses the upper valleys of the Zagros Mountains, lies immediately south of the Caspian Sea, just as Scythia lies immediately north of the same water-body.

⁶⁰ Manouchehr Moshtagh Khorasani, "Bronze and Iron Weapons from Luristan", *Antiquo Oriente* 7 (2009): 191, 194 and 202, accessed April 18, 2020, <https://repositorio.uca.edu.ar/handle/123456789/7229>

⁶¹ In addition to Fig. 14, see also H. Föll, "Luristan", accessed 18 April, 2020, https://www.tf.uni-kiel.de/matwis/amat/iss/kap_b/advanced/tb_1_1b.html, first image, both panels.

⁶² Enn Ernits, "Book Reviews – Eero Autio, *Kotkat, Hirvet, Karhut – Permiläistä Pronssitaidetta*", *Folklore* 18-19 (2001): 238-39, accessed April 14, 2020, <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol18/yell.pdf>. On the regional preference for different mounts in Ural-Siberian animal art, see A.M. Belavin, "*Emicheskoy*", 16.

⁶³ Haarmann and Marler, "Old European Ritual Life", 85.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 85; Haarmann and Marler, *Mythological Crescent*, 95 ff.



Figure 14. Master of Animals, standard finial, Luristan; bronze, *ca.* 1000-600 BCE. Los Angeles County Museum of Art, M.76.97.92. Source: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, “Standard Finial”, Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 15. Master of Animals, horse bit cheekpiece, Luristan; bronze, ca. 700 BCE. Source: Cleveland Museum of Art, 1961.33, “Horse Bit Cheekpiece”.

A recent publication on the animal-style art of the Eurasian steppe, in the form of a PhD thesis completed in 2018 by Petya Andreeva, focuses on the continuity of animal-style motifs in the arts of the Eurasian steppe during the later 1st millennium BCE. Permian bronze plaques of the 1st millennium CE are covered in an excursus titled “The Mysticism of Permian Animal Style (6th-12th c. CE): The Totemism Narrative”. The description runs as follows⁶⁶:

There are numerous examples of female goddesses riding hybrids. In some cases, animal heads or junctures protrude out of the female figurine’s head. Occasionally, the female goddess is enclosed within the body of a large predatory bird. In yet other cases, the personage stands on a horse or two reflective images of horses and in others, she is raised on a platform made of deer heads with raptor beaks. In several plaques, the deity is flanked by two male anthropomorphic figures whose heads terminate into raptors with curved beaks recalling the bird images from the early Iron Age tomb complex in Arzhan in Tuva. Two main features stand out in the designs of these plaques: the anthropomorphic figure is always placed in the center and the visual tokens of hybridity are added to form a circular enclosure around the personage. One observes the relative lack of diversity in the depiction of animals; most of the animals represented in Permian metalwork are either horses, elks or birds with exaggerated beaks.

Enclosure of the central front-facing personage, one might note in passing, is also a feature of larger Horus *cippi*, as exemplified by the booth outline

⁶⁶ Andreeva, “Fantastic Beasts”, 266.

surrounding Horus in the well-known Metternich stela (Fig. 16)⁶⁷. But let us return our attention to the Permian plaques, whose symbolism is explained by Andreeva as follows⁶⁸:

Several competing interpretations regarding the Perm animal style have been put forward by Russian scholars. One possibility includes the concept of “totemism” [...] Researchers have suggested that these casts were made to contain the souls of the tomb occupants, and as such, they were the final resting places of the spirit. [...]

Despite the large geographic distance from the Alai mountains [of Kyrgyzstan / Tajikistan], the imagery represented in the Permian animal style plaques indicate a return to the familiar Iron Age concept of animal syncretism. Here, the local people offer a slightly different take on this decorative approach as they also incorporate female images in most of the metalwork thus making even more complicated visual narratives of hybridity. [...] Animal (and human-animal) hierarchy coupled with the concept of metamorphosis and transition between realms is indubitably present in the art of the people who inhabited the southern Urals from the early [1st] millennium CE to the 13th century CE.



Figure 16. Horus *cippus*, central window from the Metternich Stele, Egypt; meta-greywacke, 30th Dynasty (360-343 BCE). Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 50.85, “Magical Stela (Cippus of Horus)”, Wikimedia Commons.

⁶⁷ “Magical Stela (Cippus of Horus)”, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 50.85, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/546037>. No doubt such booth outlines in large monumental *cippi* reprise the boundary of the smaller original round-topped stele, atop which would appear the head of Bes (as in Fig. 3).

⁶⁸ Andreeva, “Fantastic Beasts”, 270-72.

As with Artamonov, and for that matter with Autio or Marler and Haarmann, it is worth noting that Andreeva makes no mention of a possible Mesopotamian / Egyptian origin for any of the Permian designs or of the resemblance of the Permian goddess plaques to the Master/Mistress of Animals motif. A Finnish commentator has recently associated the winged goddess in one Permian bronze plaque (similar to that in Fig. 10) with the winged female in the British Museum's Burney Relief (the "Queen of the Night", whom he identifies with the Mesopotamian demoness Lilith), but his proposal is that both artifacts portray descendants of the Neolithic bird-goddess⁶⁹.

7. A break in transmission?

Moving beyond mere silence on the topic, a recent paper claims that 1st-millennium BCE animal art from the Eurasian steppe is essentially devoid of Mesopotamian-derived Master/Mistress of Animals iconography. In a paper subtitled "Human-Animal Symbolism and Mastery among Early Eurasian Steppe Societies", which appeared in the conference volume *Master of Animals – Old World Iconography*, Bryan Hanks agrees that the Master of Animals motif did reach the north coast of the Black Sea. He attributes this to northerly Greek expansion in the mid-5th century BCE rather than to the Scythian withdrawal from the Ancient Near East at the beginning of the 6th century BCE (the mechanism favoured by Artamonov). More importantly, he claims that the motif did *not* then diffuse north to the Eurasian steppe. Specifically, Hanks states that:

the Master or Mistress of Animals also are known from the Greek colonies along the north coast of the Black Sea. [...] While the appearance in the Black Sea region of the Master of Animals iconography can be traced to Greek expansion and colonization, this style of iconography did not spread into the Eurasian steppe zone in any perceptible form⁷⁰.

[...] Rather,] processes of mastery over the form and symbolism of animals in Eurasian animal-style art [...] appear to be more deeply connected to the ancient roots of human-animal symbolism that emerged independently in the Siberian region (Jacobson 1983, 1993)⁷¹.

[T]he steppe region is largely devoid of similar iconography connected with the Master/Mistress of Animals theme dealt with in other papers in this volume [...], which raises the important question as to why such differences may exist. [...] S]teppe animal-style art and the human-animal relationships it portrays suggest a

⁶⁹ "Pohjoinen Matriarkaatti? Mitä Permin Jumalattaret Kertovat?", Vanha Uskonto ja Uusi Ajattelun, published November 27, 2009, accessed April 14, 2020, <http://pakanat.blogspot.com/2009/11/pohjoinen-matriarkaatti-mita-permin.html>

⁷⁰ Bryan Hanks, "Agency, Hybridity, and Transmutation: Human-Animal Symbolism and Mastery among Early Eurasian Steppe Societies", in *The Master of Animals in Old World Iconography*, eds. Derek B. Counts and Bettina Arnold (Budapest: Archaeolingua Foundation, 2010), 175.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

very different line of development from the Master/Mistress of Animal theme found so diffused in the Near Eastern, Mediterranean, and European regions⁷².

The indigenous Siberian forms alluded to in the central quotation include an animal/human hybrid “Animal Mother” who had evolved by the early to middle Bronze Age into a “Mother of Animals”⁷³ – a female life-source who replaces animals taken in the hunt⁷⁴. Her manifestations, which survive in naturalistic petroglyphs, include a birthing woman, a woman at the margin of a hunt, and a woman in a sexual embrace with a man⁷⁵. By the Late Bronze Age / mid-2nd millennium BCE, her importance had been usurped by the male hunter-hero and the Mother of Animals gradually disappeared from the visual repertoire⁷⁶. Her iconography has little or nothing in common with the Mesopotamian/Greek Mistress of Animals motif, so the two should not be confused.

There is no mention of Permian animal art in Hanks’ paper, most likely because his temporal focus is the Iron Age and Permian animal art did not begin until the early 1st millennium CE, peaking in the 6-9th centuries CE. In the prologue to the book, the editors assess Hanks’ contribution as follows⁷⁷:

[T]he Master of Animals, usually represented as a humanoid figure exerting control over one or more animals, and the Animal Master, who may combine within his person both human and animal elements (Lot-Falck 1953:174); typically one or both of these manifestations of mastery are found in post-Neolithic Old World societies. However, the absence of the two most common Old World Master of Animals figures in the pastoral Iron Age societies of the steppe region (Hanks, this volume), in spite of its links to areas that did develop such a symbolic complex, suggests that further study of its distribution is necessary.

It would be most interesting to extend the temporal scope of this analysis to include the mid- to late 1st millennium CE, when designs resembling some embodiments of the Master of Animals motif do become evident in the bronze art of the Eurasian steppe, at least in that of the Perm region (Figs. 9-11).

The other reason why Permian plaques such as Figs. 9-11 might have escaped recognition as descendants of the Master/Mistress of Animals motif is that the central figure no longer grasps the flanking animals or fights with them. There has been a shift in composition, such that the front-facing anthropomorph no longer dominates and subdues the animal forms but is aligned and even integrated with them. The meaning of the scene has changed. Despite the composition’s visual overlap with the Horus *cippus*, it no longer depicts divine/human subjugation of the

⁷² *Ibid.*, 185.

⁷³ Esther Jacobson-Tepfer, *The Hunter, the Stag, and the Mother of Animals: Image, Monument, and Landscape in Ancient North Asia* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), chap. 10 (Kindle location 8965).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, chap. 4 (Kindle locations 3838-3839) and chap. 10 (Kindle location 8967).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, chap. 4 (Kindle locations 3838-3839).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. 5 (Kindle locations 4626-4636) and chap. 10 (Kindle locations 8974-8975 and 8984).

⁷⁷ Arnold and Counts, “Prolegomenon”, 15-16.

chaotic animal realm; Haarman and Marler’s “Mistress of Nature” is in fact the “Protectress of Animals”⁷⁸.

Such changes in the meaning of the original motif are not at all unprecedented. For example, in Aegean depictions of the Mistress of Animals from the 2nd millennium BCE, the flanking animals seem to revere the central female⁷⁹; unlike the later Greek form of the Mistress, who follows the Mesopotamian template, the Minoan/Mycenaean goddess seems to enjoy an affectionate relationship with her beasts⁸⁰. A related but even more radical repurposing took place in the royal tombs of Ramesside Egypt (13-11th centuries BCE), where the Mistress of Animals motif was recruited for the sky-goddess Nut in her guise as the “Mysterious Lady” (Fig. 17)⁸¹; with the Mistress now acting in concert with the animals that surround her, “the scene serves as a concise representation of the solar journey”⁸². Hieroglyphic captions explain that the head of the goddess is “in the Upper *Duat*, while her two feet are in the Lower *Duat*’ [...] where the Upper *Duat* is equivalent to the height of the daylight world, and the Lower *Duat* is synonymous with *h̄tmy.t*, the ‘Place of Annihilation’ [...] where the Damned are punished”⁸³. We shall see in the next section that a cosmological interpretation of this kind is often applied to the Permian goddess, too⁸⁴.

8. Local meaning

As one might expect from the scholarly reluctance to acknowledge foreign influences (Sections 6 & 7), most analyses of Permian bronzes interpret the “goddess plaques” solely in terms of indigenous Finno-Ugric mythology⁸⁵. In this idiom, compositions such as Figs. 9-11 are taken to depict a three-tiered cosmology: at top, the heavens (symbolised by the sun, birds, heads/faces); in the centre, the terrestrial world (the domain of people and animals, ruled by the goddess who dominates the space); and, at bottom, the lower earthly or invisible subterranean world (symbolised by land-animals under the feet of the goddess – lizards, pangolins, bears, elks, horses or reptilian hybrids)⁸⁶. This tripartite division

⁷⁸ Haarman and Marler, *Mythological Crescent*, 93.

⁷⁹ Lena Papazoglou-Manioudaki, “Ring with Master of Animals”, in *Beyond Babylon: Art, Trade, and Diplomacy in the Second Millennium B.C.*, eds. Joan Aruz, Kim Benzel and Jean M. Evans (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2008), 278.

⁸⁰ N. Marinatos, *The Goddess and the Warrior*, chap. 6 (Kindle location 1519-1800).

⁸¹ Joshua A. Roberson, *The Ancient Egyptian Books of the Earth* (Atlanta: Lockwood Press, 2012), 253-56; R. Ritner, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice*, 224, including fn. 1041; Nils Billig, “The Secret One: An Analysis of a Core Motif in the Books of the Netherworld”, *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 34 (2006): 51-52.

⁸² Roberson, *Books of the Earth*, 254.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 254-55.

⁸⁴ There is, of course, no suggestion that images in the Valley of the Kings exercised any influence on what happened in many centuries later in northern Eurasia; the Mysterious Lady is mentioned solely to show how profoundly the Master/Mistress of Animals motif can be reinterpreted within a new cultural context.

⁸⁵ E.g. Belavin, “*Emicheskoy*”, regards the art as purely Ugric. Autio, “Permian Animal Style”, 169, observes that “At the beginning of the 1950s, the opinion that most motifs are of Permian origin, started to become the canon in the Soviet Union”; perhaps this stance has continued as the norm amongst Russian scholars.

⁸⁶ Autio, *Kotkat, Hirvet, Karhut*; A.M. Belavin, “*Emicheskoy*”; Senator Publishing, “*Permskiy Zverinyy Stil’ – Bogini*”.

of the cosmos aligns with the “sacred trinity” of Eurasian symbolism identified by Haarmann and Marler as the bird, the goddess, and the bear⁸⁷. Although the creators of the Permian bronzes left no written records of the plaques’ meaning or purpose⁸⁸, local or regional myths have been recruited to interpret the compositions; some of these have been documented by Eero Autio⁸⁹. In an extension of the associations already given, Autio identifies the reptile(s) at the bottom of many Permian plaques (equivalent to the crocodiles of the Horus *cippus*) with the underworld, the domain of the dead⁹⁰.

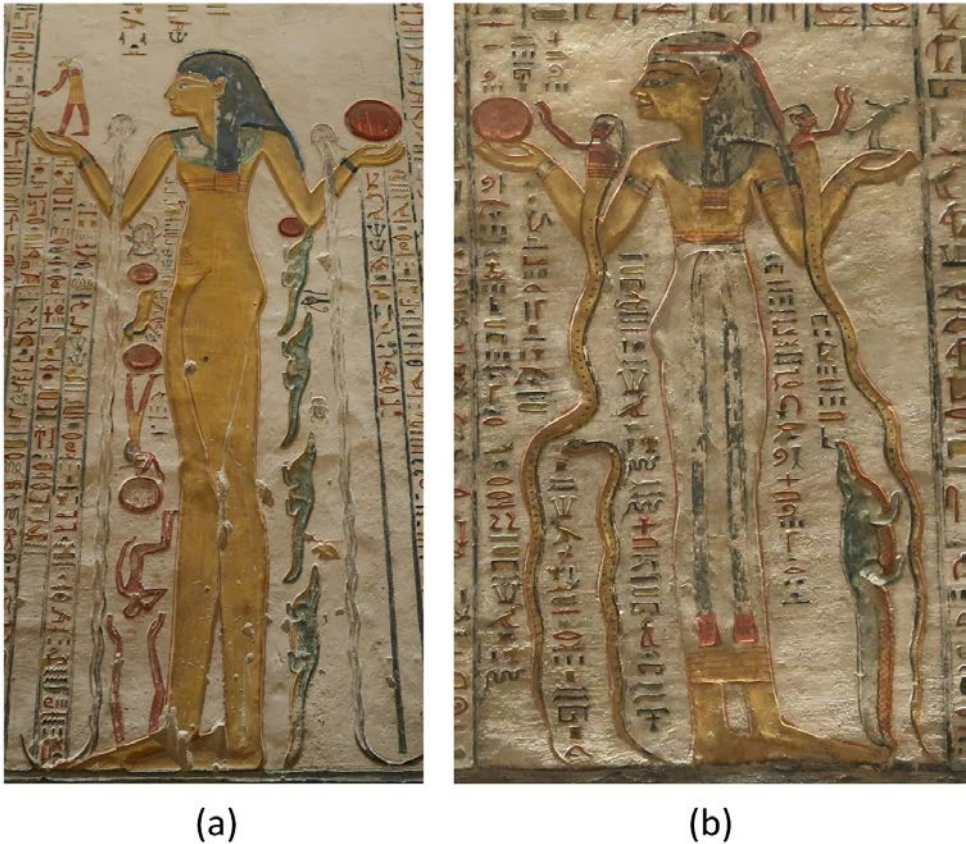


Figure 17. The Egyptian sky-goddess Nut as the “Mysterious Lady” (*Št3.t*, Shetat) in the tomb of Ramses VI, KV9, Valley of the Kings, Egypt (ca. 1134 BCE). (a) Burial chamber, left/south wall; Book of the Earth. (b) Well room, right/north wall; Book of Caverns, Section 5. Source: Lloyd D. Graham, February 2020.

⁸⁷ Haarmann and Marler, “The Goddess and the Bear”, 68.

⁸⁸ “*Permskiy Zverinyi Stil*”, Senator Publishing, published 2018, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.perm-animal-style.ru/>

⁸⁹ Autio, “Permian Animal Style”.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 179. Belavin, “*Emicheskoy*”, 17, also identifies these mounts with the underworld.

Specific interpretations have been offered for many of the plaques by a Perm-based website and virtual museum named “Perm Animal Style”⁹¹. Those for Figs. 9-11 are mostly based on Khanty mythology. For Fig. 9, we are informed as follows⁹²:

The goddess is surrounded by storks on the “spirit of the bear-cubs”. The storks are guides of souls, holding five souls from above on their beaks. Another soul on the cubs is the protagonist of the amulet. The patient’s soul is in trouble, it has almost crossed the line between the world of the living and the dead. By the order of the goddess, the “spirit of the cubs” is sent in the form of a mouse to the Lower World and returns the soul to the patient.

For Fig. 10⁹³:

The goddess stands on spiders weaving a web, along which the souls of the dead should pass over a boiling resinous river. The waves of this river we see below the composition. People pray to the goddess, they are in trouble. The goddess with wings is the ancestor of the clan (a mask is on her chest) and an intercessor for people before the supreme deity. The amulet is of special strength, it was addressed when misfortune (epidemic, invasion) threatened the whole people.

For Fig. 11⁹⁴:

On the braids of the goddess are birds facing the solar deity. In the hands of the goddess are fur animals. Snakes: the rivers of the universe flowing from the Lower World – from the lizard – to the Upper World.

For the most part, the plaques are being interpreted as apotropaic and curative devices intended to aid individuals or groups who are sick or in danger. Of course, this is precisely the function held by the Horus *cippus* in ancient Egypt and the Lamashtu amulet in the ancient Near East. The following extract from one of the hieroglyphic incantations on the Metternich Stele, whose *cippus* window appears in Fig. 16, leaves no doubt as to its purpose⁹⁵:

It is your [i.e., Horus’] formulae which come from your mouth, [...] to make your guard, to repeat your protection, to seal the mouth of every serpent, of those in the sky, those on the land, those in the water, to make people live, to make the gods content, to transfigure Ra in your glorifications. Come to me quickly today as you have made a boat sailing. Repel for me every lion on the desert slope, every crocodile on the river, every biting mouth in their cavern. Do it for me like the stone of the desert mountain, like the sherd edge in the street. Remove for me

⁹¹ “*Permskiy Zverinyy Stil’ – Fotogalereya Permskogo Zverinogo Stilya*”, Senator Publishing, published 2018, accessed April 14, 2020, <https://www.perm-animal-style.ru/photo/>

⁹² Senator Publishing, “*Permskiy Zverinyy Stil’ – Bogini*”, overlay for goddess 7, author’s translation.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, overlay for goddess 8, author’s translation.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, overlay for goddess 6, author’s translation.

⁹⁵ University College London, “Horus Stelae”.

the poison of the bite which is in every limb of the patient, so that your words are not rejected on account of it. See, your name is called today. [...] May you cause the sufferer to live for me, so that adoration is given to you by the populace.

The Perm Animal Style website says that the genre to which it is devoted was “born of the Ural civilization in dialogue with the great cultures of the world”⁹⁶. It adds that the cult of the “goddess on the reptile” is older than that of the bird-human hybrids and that known examples of the former predate the heyday of the Permian animal style by several centuries⁹⁷. The present paper develops and extends these observations by proposing that the origin of Permian goddess plaques lies in the Ancient Near East and/or Egypt. Other forms of Permian animal art may well be largely or entirely local in concept and design.

The assimilation of a *cippus*-like Master of Animals template into Permian art would parallel the integration of the Master of Animals into Anglo-Saxon art (Fig. 8). Of course, once it had been co-opted into the Permian visual repertoire, the motif would then be free to morph into derivatives with ever less resemblance to the original – descendant designs carrying new meanings appropriate to their Finno-Ugric cultural context. The transformation of the Mistress of Animals motif into a solar-cycle vignette within Egyptian royal funerary texts (Fig. 17) offers a salient glimpse of just such an acculturation process in action. The Mesopotamian (re)appropriation of the Egyptian Horus *cippus*, and its rapid transformation into an amulet against the Mesopotamian demon Lamashtu (Fig. 4), offers another. The Coptic adaptation of the Horus *cippus* to represent St. Menas “as a standing orant figure [...] between the two kneeling camels that carried his body to Abu Mena” (Fig. 6) provides a third⁹⁸.

9. Other influences

The Master of Animals motif preserved in the royal art of medieval Africa – mentioned in Section 2 of the paper – is a rather minimal form of the original Mesopotamian design. The template has also undergone some shifts in composition: the legs of the protagonist have often become snakes (Fig. 18a)⁹⁹, creating an overlap with the anguipede Abrasax, a hybrid deity/archon/aeon popular on amuletic gemstones from the Mediterranean world of Roman and Late Antique times (Fig. 18b)¹⁰⁰. Accordingly, sub-Saharan expressions of the Master of Animals motif have relatively little visual overlap with the version embodied by the Horus *cippus*.

⁹⁶ Senator Publishing, “*Permskiy Zverinyy Stil’ – Fotogalereya Permskogo Zverinogo Stilya*”, author’s translation.

⁹⁷ Senator Publishing, “*Permskiy Zverinyy Stil’ – Bogini*”.

⁹⁸ “St. Menas Pilgrim-Flasks or Ampullae”, St. Mina Monastery, published October 16, 2003, accessed April 14, 2020, <http://www.stmina-monastery.org/ampullae.htm>

⁹⁹ Obenga, “Le ‘Maître des Animaux,’” 56-57.

¹⁰⁰ E.A. Wallis Budge, *Amulets and Superstitions* (New York: Dover, 1978), 208; H. Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 331 and references therein. These magical gems were essentially the heirs and successors of the Horus *cippus*; see University College London, “Horus Stelae”.



Figure 18. African Master of Animals and Abrasax. (a) Master of Animals; Benin plaque, bronze, 16-17th century CE. British Museum, Af 1898,0115.30. (b) The snake-legged deity (or “Gnostic” archon/aeon) known as Abrasax or Abraxas; illustration from a Late Antique amuletic gem. Source for (a): © Trustees of the British Museum, “Benin Plaques”, British Museum, Af 1898,0115.30; . Source for (b): Bernard De Montfaucon, *L’Antiquité expliquée et représentée en Figures* (Paris: F. Delaulne, 1719), 2.2: 358.

The Master of Animals motif was presumably carried from Egypt to Nubia in predynastic or pharaonic times and then diffused southwest to Cameroon and Nigeria. If the Horus *cippus* was one of the intermediaries of this intercultural transfer, then its embellishments were diluted and lost *en route* to the west coast¹⁰¹. As already mentioned, other traits were gained; at some point in its African journey, the core motif appears to have become influenced by the Abrasax figure, which also travelled widely in its role as a magical agency.

North of the Mediterranean, snake-legged depictions of the Earth Mother were common in Scythia¹⁰² – the culture from which Permian bronze art arose. However, anguipede templates seem to have exercised little or no influence on the Master/Mistress of Animals motif during its transmission to northern Eurasia.

¹⁰¹ Despite occasional parallels between ancient Egyptian and modern West African belief, there is no credible evidence to support the notion that ancient Egyptians migrated south to Nigeria or were the ancestors of the Yoruba; R.W. Wescott, “Ancient Egypt and Modern Africa”, *Journal of African History* 2, no. 2 (1961), 311-21; Jock M. Agai, “Did the Ancient Egyptians Migrate to Ancient Nigeria?”, *Verbum et Ecclesia* 35, no.1 (2014): e832, <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ve.v35i1.832>

¹⁰² Nikos Chausidis, “Mythical Representations of ‘Mother Earth’ in Pictorial Media”, in *Archaeology of Mother Earth Sites and Sanctuaries through the Ages: Rethinking Symbols and Images, Art and Artefacts from History and Prehistory*, ed. G. Terence Meaden (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2012), 13.

10. Conclusion

While many types of Permian bronze animal plaque may indeed be purely local in concept and design, “goddess plaques” of the type exemplified by Figs. 9-11 seem to have their roots in the Ancient Near Eastern template known as the Master/Mistress of Animals. Their similarity to the popular Egyptian derivative known as the Horus *cippus* – a template known to have percolated back into the Ancient Near East, including northern Mesopotamia and Anatolia, – is particularly strong. Transfer of the Master/Mistress of Animals motif from the Near East to the Ural region is likely to have occurred via the Scythians of the 1st millennium BCE; among bronzes of the appropriate period from Luristan are many Master of Animals motifs with *cippus*-like features.

If the proposal advanced in this communication is correct, then the Permians co-opted a version of the Master of Animals motif into their visual vocabulary; they would probably have been the most northerly population to do so. While not doubting the validity of Finno-Ugric interpretations of the goddess plaques for the peoples of the western Urals, it may be useful to recognise that these striking artworks are potentially derived from a well-travelled template of exceptional antiquity – one with a distant southern origin.

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