An argument for a Bronze Age introduction of the chicken in Greece

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MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY

AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND JOURNAL FOR THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN WORLD

Vol. 34/35, 2021/2022

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
AUSTRALIAN ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE AT ATHENS

MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY
Australian and New Zealand Journal for the Archaeology of the Mediterranean World

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Mediterranean Archaeology is produced by
MEDITARCH, CCANESA, Madsen Building (F09), The University of Sydney, NSW 2006 Australia

and distributed by Sydney University Press
Fisher Library (F03), The University of Sydney, NSW 2006 Australia

e-mail: sup.info@sydney.edu.au or phil.jones@sydney.edu.au; on-line sales: https://sydneyuniversitypress.com.au

Price double volume:

Aus$ 180.00 (institutional)
Aus$ 150.00 (personal)
Aus$ 100.00 (student)

Layout by Céline von Tobel, La Civette, Geneva
Printed by Ligare on archive-quality paper (October 2022).

ISSN 1030-8482

MEDITERRANEAN ARCHAEOLOGY

Vol. 34/35, 2021/2022

ABBREVIATIONS

The reference system adopted by *Meditarch* is modelled on that of the German Archaeological Institute, and the bibliographical abbreviations are those listed in *Archäologischer Anzeiger* 1997, 612–24, and on the German Archaeological Institute's website, https://www.dainst.org/en/publikationen/publizieren-beim-dai/richtlinien, with the addition of the following:

ABNGV	Annual Bulletin of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
ABVic	Art Bulletin of Victoria, Melbourne
Atti I CMGr	Atti del primo Convegno di studi sulla Magna Grecia
BAPD	Beazley Archive Pottery Database
Beazley, ABV	J. D. Beazley, Attic Black-figure Vase-painters (1956)
Beazley, Addenda	Beazley Addenda. Additional References to ABV, ARV (2nd ed.) & Paralipomena, compiled by L. Burn & R. Glynn (1982)
Beazley, Addenda^2	Beazley Addenda. Additional References to ABV, ARV (2nd ed.) & Paralipomena, ed. by T. H. Carpenter (1989)
Beazley, ARV	J. D. Beazley, Attic Red-figure Vase-painters (2nd ed., 1963)
Beazley, EVP	J. D. Beazley, Etruscan Vase Painting (1947)
Beazley, Paralipomena	J. D. Beazley, Paralipomena. Additions to Attic Black-figure Vase-painters and to Attic Red-figure Vase-painters (1971)
BTCGI	G. Nenci–G. Vallet (eds.), Bibliografia topografica della colonizzazione Greca in Italia, Iff. (1977ff.)
CCEC	Cahiers du Centre d'études chypriotes
DACL	Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie
DOP	Dumbarton Oaks Papers
NEA	Near Eastern Archaeology
OEANE	E. M. Meyers (ed.), The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East (1997)
ProcBritAc	Proceedings of the British Academy
QBNGV	Quarterly Bulletin of the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
RGVV	Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten
SHAJ	Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan (Department of Antiquities, Amman)

Abbreviations of ancient authors and works, and transliterations of Greek names conform to those listed in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*.

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AN ARGUMENT FOR A BRONZE AGE INTRODUCTION OF THE CHICKEN IN GREECE*

Jorrit M. Kelder

The arrival of the chicken (*Gallus gallus domesticus*) in ancient Greece during the Archaic period is often presented as an established fact. Given that the chicken was referred to as 'the Persian Bird', and because the bird only appears in Greek written sources from the 6th century BC onwards, there seemed to be good grounds to do so. Over the years, however, osteological remains have been found in much earlier contexts, and although recent studies have now cast some doubt on the reliability of this evidence, various early depictions of and references to the bird strongly suggest that the chicken was already known at a much earlier date. By surveying all the available evidence, including faunal remains, iconography, and written sources, this paper challenges the traditional date of the chicken's introduction in Greece and instead argues that the bird was known in the Aegean at least as early as the Middle Bronze Age.

STATUS QUAESTIONIS

The first to suggest that the chicken arrived in Greece in the 6th century BC as a result of contacts with the Persian empire appears to have been Victor Hehn.[1] He based his view on the facts that neither Homer nor Hesiod mention the cock which in Greek literature Theognis (v. 864) is the first to name, and that the bird, ἀλέκτωρ, is often referred to as Περσικὸς ὄρνις, the Persian bird. At Hehn's time, the archaeological evidence seemed to confirm that the bird was unknown in Greece before the Archaic period, its earliest known representations not pre-dating the late 7th century.[2]

Although the cock has subsequently been identified in earlier Greek imagery,[3] the iconographic evidence has largely been ignored in discussions on the bird's introduction to Greece, and some of the early attestations may indeed be questionable. The view that the pair of terracotta birds found in a boy's grave in the Athenian Kerameikos dated to *c.*740 BC represent cocks,[4] has recently been challenged, as little other than their combs is to suggest that they are meant to represent cocks.[5] Similarly, the presence of an askos in the shape of a hippalektryon at 9th-century BC Knossos could be explained as a result of Oriental (Phoenician or Cypriot) influence, and may not prove

*Acknowledgments. Despite their prevalence in Mediterranean archaeology, cocks have received remarkably little attention in academic debate. I encountered the first specimens during my studies at the University of Amsterdam, and their peculiar status and behaviour have fascinated me ever since. I happily acknowledge my debt to many of the university's then and present staff for the inspiration and impetus they have provided for the present study. I am grateful to the two anonymous reviewers of this journal, and for the useful feedback of numerous colleagues, most notably Cécile Michel, Robert Rollinger, and Jeffrey Spier. I am indebted to the editor of this journal for his patience and guidance. Naturally, any infelicity that remains is my responsibility. I wish to dedicate this paper to my beautiful wife Calie, for obvious reasons.

[1] Kulturpflanzen und Haustiere in ihrem Übergang aus Asien nach Griechenland und Italien sowie in das übrige Europa (1870) 278–1.

[2] For an Early Corinthian examples, see, e.g., the olpe British Museum 1860.2-1.18 (A 1352): D. A. Amyx, Corinthian Vase-painting of the Archaic Period (1988) I 340, with further refs. (here **pl. 1: 2**). On the Late Corinthian alabastron New York, Metr. Mus. 41.162.57 (H. Payne, Necrocorinthia [1931] 319 no. 1225 pl. 36: 12 [here **pl. 1: 3**]), the positioning of the cocks confronting each other may suggest a cockfight, a recurring motif in later periods. Not much later, from 540 BC onwards, cocks also appear on Panathenaic amphorae, possibly in reference to competition and military virtue (M. L. Popkin, 'Roosters, Columns and Athena on early Panathenaic prize amphorae', Hesperia 81, 2012, 207–35).

[3] See O. Keller, Die antike Tierwelt, II. Vögel, Reptilien, Fische, Insekten, Spinnentiere, Tausendfüssler, Krebstiere, Würmer, Weichtiere, Stachelhäuter, Schlauchtiere (1913) 131; Payne op. cit. 76 with further refs.

[4] K. Kübler, Kerameikos V 1. Die Nekropole des 10. bis 8. Jahrhunderts (1954) 245 pl. 144 (inv. 1308 and 1309); J. N. Coldstream, Geometric Greece (1977) 312–13; Popkin art. cit. 217 n. 41.

[5] C. Chandezon, 'Le coq et la poule en Grèce ancienne: mutations d'un rapport de domestication', RA 71, 2021, 74.

that the chicken was known to its creator.[6] Yet, there are early instances of the bird in Greek iconography that cannot be dismissed and the accumulative weight of these occurrences seems to warrant a review of all available evidence. Examples of early and unambiguous representations of the bird include several late-8th-century Corinthian aryballoi of the so-called First Outline Group,[7] whereas in Athens cocks serve as protomes on the Protoattic lebes Kerameikos inv. 150 as early as the 2nd q. of the 7th century (**pl. 1: 1**).[8] As for earlier representations, the nature of Geometric art would obviously make it impossible to identify cocks among the abstract representations of birds.

EARLY ATTESTATIONS IN THE FAUNAL RECORD

Osteological evidence for the presence of the chicken in the Iron Age and earlier periods is ambiguous, as a recent study has shown, revealing that at least 23 of bones found in Bronze and Early Iron Age contexts in various sites throughout Europe and a few sites in Anatolia and Morocco were in fact themselves much younger and apparently intrusive.[9] The osteological evidence thus needs to be treated with care, and it cannot be excluded that future analyses may show that some of the evidence presented below is of later date than currently thought.

Chicken eggshell is reported from an 8th-century dump at Kommos—apparently the oldest chicken eggshell known from Greece[10]—and there is more evidence for the chicken's presence in the Bronze Age. Chicken bones were identified at Lerna, where one femur came from an early MH stratum.[11] At Tiryns, there are at least 14 attestations in secure Helladic strata: 1 LH II, 1 MH II, 2 MH III, 1 LH I–II, 2 LH IIIB2, and 7 LH IIIC,[12] though in the recent study referred to above, two of them have now been dated to the Roman period.[13] That the chicken was also known in the Minoan world, as O. Keller had suspected on the basis of iconographic evidence as early as 1913,[14] may now also be demonstrated by the recent discovery of various chicken bones in closed MM deposits from Ayios Georgios on Kythera.[15]

Reports from other sites raise the possibility that the bird was more widely known during the Middle and Late Bronze Age, although the context is not always secure. Part of a femur from a chicken was identified at Ayios Stephanos near Sparta, but the bone came from 'a basket that produced MH I, LH II but possibly also Medieval sherds'.[16] Eight chicken bones were found in Bronze Age layers at Chalcis in Aetolia, but these could be later intrusions.[17] Similarly, the two chicken bones that were apparently found in MM II levels at Kommos may perhaps have to be

[6] J. N. Coldstream, 'The Knossian Protohippalektryon', in: H.-U. Cain–H. Gabelmann–D. Salzmann (eds.), Festschrift für Nikolaus Himmelmann. Beiträge zur Ikonographie und Hermeneutik (1989) 23–6.

[7] Amyx op. cit. I 15 pl. 1: 1–2 (with further refs.).

[8] K. Kübler, Kerameikos VI. Die Nekropole des späten 8. bis frühen 6. Jahrhunderts (1970) Tafelband, 2. Teil 463–4 no. 53 pl. 44.

[9] J. Best *et al.*, 'Redefining the timing and circumstances of the chicken's introduction to Europe and north-west Africa', Antiquity 2022 (published online: doi 10.15184/aqy.2021.90), 1–15.

[10] D. S. Reese–M. Rose–D. Ruscillo, 'The Iron Age Fauna', in: J. W. Shaw–M. C. Shaw (eds.), Kommos IV. The Greek Sanctuary (2000) 566.

[11] J. L. Caskey, 'Lerna in the Early Bronze Age', AJA 72, 1968, 316 refers to 'domestic fowl'; N.-G. Gejvall, Lerna: a Preclassical Site in the Argolid, I: the Fauna (1969) 47–9 pl. 20: 13.

[12] A. von den Driesch–J. Boessneck in: H.-J. Weishaar *et al.* (eds.), Tiryns. Forschungen und Berichte, 11: Die Keramik von Talioti (1990) 114–15; D. S. Reese, 'Faunal Remains from Early Helladic II Lerna', Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry 13.1, 2013, 305.

[13] Best *et al.* art. cit. 5.

[14] Loc. cit. (n. 3).

[15] K. Trantalidou, 'Dans l'ombre du rite: vestiges d'animaux et pratiques sacrificielles en Grèce antique. Note sur la diversité des contextes et les difficultés de recherche rencontrées', in: G. Ekroth–J. Wallensten (eds.), Bones, behaviour and belief: the zooarchaeological evidence as a source for ritual practice in ancient Greece and beyond. ActaAth 55 (2013) 63–5.

[16] W. D. Taylour–R. Janko (eds.), Ayios Stephanos: Excavations at a Bronze Age and Medieval Settlement in Southern Laconia (2008) 513 (Mourer-Chauviré–Reese); D. Mylona, 'The Bronze Age birds in Greece. A zooarchaeological perspective', Quaternary International 626–27, 2020, 71–9.

[17] S. Dietz–I. Moschos (eds.), Chalkis Aitolias, I: the Prehistoric Periods. Monographs Danish Inst. Athens 7 (2006) 183 (Bangsgaard Jensen).

dismissed because of the presence of a Classical sherd in that same deposit.[18] Chicken bones were also recognized in Bronze Age layers at Mycenae: A. J. B. Wace refers to the presence of the bird,[19] though I was unable to ascertain whether this single bone came from a closed Bronze Age context.

BRONZE AGE DEPICTIONS

There are other arguments to support the notion that chickens arrived in the Aegean during the Bronze Age. J. Binberg points to various possible depictions in the Mycenaean world.[20] Whilst the 'galliform bird' sitting in a palm tree on an LH IIIB2 fresco from Tiryns cannot unequivocally be identified as a chicken,[21] it does show some resemblance to Near Eastern imagery of the chicken and recalls in particular an ivory pyxis from 14th-century Aššur (cf. below). A number of LH IIIB–C potsherds may depict cocks: some of them seem to show long, curved tail feathers, whereas a comb can be discerned on two fragments, although these latter fragments have also been identified as depictions of quails.[22]

The clearest iconographical evidence for the presence of the chicken in the Bronze Age Aegean, however, comes from Crete. Binberg lists a bird-shaped vessel from EM III Ayia Triada and an MM II relief vessel: both vessels show birds with high curved tail feathers which resemble those of cocks.[23] Yet, surely the most conclusive piece of evidence for the presence of the cock on Minoan Crete is a remarkable clay nodule from House A at Zakros (**fig. 1a**). Published by D. G. Hogarth in 1902,[24] it shows two cocks on either side of what is almost certainly an altar. The sealing is unique and, like the other 500 clay impressions that were found with it, is thought to originally have been attached to a leather (possibly parchment) object.[25] The naturalistic rendition of the birds' pose and morphology (the tail feathers, the wattle, and the comb) makes their identification as cocks all but certain. A somewhat more abstract rendition of the bird may plausibly be identified on a steatite seal from central Crete published in 1894 by A. J. Evans (**fig. 1b**) who noted that 'this is the earliest evidence of the cock,—the original home of which is traditionally sought in Persia,—on European soil',[26] and though his suggestion that two confronted birds on another (three-sided) seal from Mokhos, Pedeada, may likewise represent the bird seems to go beyond the available evidence,[27] he certainly was correct in stating that the bird was known in Late (and perhaps even Middle) Bronze Age Crete.

Figure 1: Whereabouts unknown. (a) MM seal from Zakros (after Hogarth 1902), *c.*1:1; (b) LM seal from central Crete (after Evans 1894), not to scale.

[18] J. W. Shaw–M. C. Shaw (eds.), Kommos I, 1: the Kommos Region, Ecology, and Minoan Industries (1995) 196 (Reese); A. Shapland, Over the Horizon: Human-Animal Relations in Bronze Age Crete (2009) 229.

[19] Mycenae: an Archaeological History and Guide (1949) 106.

[20] Birds in the Aegean Bronze Age (2018) 168.

[21] Binberg op. cit. 171.

[22] E. Vermeule–V. Karageorghis, Mycenaean Pictorial Vase Painting (1982) cat. no. X.62.

[23] Op. cit. 168; also S. Hood, The Minoans. Crete in the Bronze Age (1971) 91.

[24] D. H. Hogarth, 'The Zakro Sealings', JHS 22, 1902, 88 no. 128 pl. 10.

[25] J. Weingarten, 'The Use of the Zakros Sealings', Kadmos 22, 1983, 6–13.

[26] 'Primitive Pictographs and a Prae-Phoenician Script, from Crete and the Peloponnese', JHS 14, 1894, 342 fig. 65a.

[27] A. J. Evans, 'Further Discoveries of Cretan and Aegean Script', JHS 17, 1897, 333 pl. 10: 16a (no measurments given).

Given the fact that there is quite some evidence for chickens in Bronze Age Greece, the (near) absence of evidence for their presence in Iron Age Greece is puzzling. Indeed, S. Hood suggested that, 'if fowl existed in Greece in the Bronze Age, it may have gone extinct for a time at the end of it'.[28] Whilst such a scenario cannot be ruled out on the basis of faunal remains alone, I would argue that it is more likely that osteological evidence may simply not have been recorded, recognized, or—when it was recognized—dismissed as later intrusions, precisely because the bird is commonly thought to be a late arrival to the Greek world. There is a worrying tendency in Aegean prehistory to adjust evidence to pre-existing paradigms,[29] and even though recent studies demonstrate that some of these bones were, indeed, later intrusions, it seems that in order to make statements about a species's presence or absence at a given site, all of the available evidence needs to be taken into account. Given the iconographic evidence for the bird's presence in the Greek world from the late 8th century BC onwards, one has to wonder about the reliability of the faunal record. There is the real possibility that the bird's absence in the archaeological record may be due to our sampling methods,[30] or simply because we are not looking for the chicken in the right place. In his description of Britain, Caesar wrote that the island's inhabitants bred chickens for their own amusement, but did not eat them.[31] Research now suggests that the chicken was probably venerated in pre-Roman Britain, which may account for the bird's near-absence in domestic contexts.[32] To argue that 'all claims for the presence of pre-Iron Age European chickens should be rejected unless supported by direct radiocarbon dating of the bones themselves',[33] thus seems somewhat overzealous. I would argue that if people could accurately depict a cock, they had probably seen one.

CONNOTATIONS

If the iconography is to be trusted, the cock had entered Greece by the 2nd millennium BC at the latest. Around the middle of that millennium, the bird was sufficiently well known and, for whatever reasons, sufficiently appealing, to appear on Minoan seals. The fact that Minoan artists choose to depict the cock on their seals suggests that the bird was not merely a 'neutral' presence in the Minoan mind. The bird must have carried certain connotations and was perhaps associated with specific qualities or even deities. In view of the bird's later status as a symbol of virility, it may well have been associated with (perhaps specific groups of) warriors. Binberg already offered this as an explanation for the bird's prevalence in LH IIIC Tiryns, and, especially in view of our growing appreciation of Minoan martial prowess, it is entirely plausible that the bird was similarly viewed by the Bronze Age inhabitants of Crete.[34] It is perhaps no mere coincidence that the sealing from Zakros (showing the first clearly identifiable cock in the Aegean) is dated to MM II–III: a period marked by outbursts of widespread violence throughout Crete.[35]

[28] Hood op. cit. 91.

[29] See J. Kelder, 'Text matters. Epigraphy, archaeology, and our understanding of the Mycenaean world'. Lecture presented at the international conference *Texts within the Material World: Assemblages, Contexts, Networks in Ancient Societies from Africa to Asia*, held at Pisa, 1–3 December, 2021 (available online: https://www.academia.edu/63728598/Text_Matters_Epigraphy_archaeology_and_our_understanding_of_the_Mycenaean_world).

[30] R. W. Redding, 'The Pig and the Chicken in the Middle East', Journal of Archaeological Research 23/4, 2015, 325–68.

[31] *BGall* V 12: 6 (*leporem et gallinam et anserem gustare fas non putant; haec tamen alunt animi voluptatisque causa*).

[32] R. Sullivan, 'Ancient Britons didn't eat hares or chickens—they venerated them', available online: https://edition.cnn.com/2020/04/10/europe/ancient-briton-hare-chicken-gods-intl-scli-scn-gbr/index.html.

[33] Best *et al.* art. cit. (n. 9) 9.

[34] Binberg op. cit. (n. 20) 196; for Minoan warrior culture, see B. Molloy, 'Malice in Wonderland: the Role of Warfare in Minoan Society', in: S. O'Brien–D. Boatright (eds.), Warfare and Society in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean (2013) 59–70; id., 'Martial Minoans? War as social process, practice and event in Bronze Age Crete', BSA 107, 2012, 87–142.

[35] I. Schoep, 'Looking beyond the first palaces: Elites and the agency of power in EM III-MM II Crete', AJA 110, 2006, 58; M. H. Wiener, 'The Nature and Control of Minoan Foreign Trade', in: N. H. Gale (ed.), Bronze Age Trade in the Mediterranean. Papers presented at the conference held at Rewly House, Oxford, in December 1989. SIMA 90 (1991) 331.

The bird's martial qualities were just one feature that may have rendered the cock a suitable motif for Minoan seals and, perhaps, Mycenaean pottery. The cock was, and indeed is, a universal solar symbol throughout Eurasia because of its tendency to crow just before dawn—announcing, as it were, the arrival of the sun. In Islam, the cock is considered a divine symbol, reminding the faithful to pray, whereas in Christianity, it alludes to Peter's triple denial of Jesus. In Classical Greek tradition, the cock's associations were manifold, and though the bird was often linked to the cycles of the sun and the moon, it was also associated with more abstract concepts of passage, including childbirth and rebirth.[36] Because of this, the cock is associated with numerous deities. The bird was sacred to Helios as well as to Apollo; a logical association given their connection to the sun.[37] In addition, the cock was associated with Apollo's son Asclepios (Socrates, on his deathbed, bids his followers to sacrifice a cock to the god[38]) and with his mother Leto (Aelian, *De natura animalium* IV 29 records that a cock assisted Leto in giving birth to Apollo and Artemis). Conversely, the bird was sometimes associated with Hermes (in his role as a psychopomp) and with Persephone.[39] The bird is prominently shown on a series of remarkable pinakes from the goddess's temple at Locri in Calabria.[39a] Here, the cock may have served as an emblem for 'death' and 'rebirth', or it may have signified another 'transition', that of a girl becoming a woman—in this case, Hades' wife.[40] The latter may be compared to Zeus' abduction of Ganymede. Depictions of this event regularly show Ganymede holding a cock.[41] Indeed, from the 5th century BC onwards, the bird is often shown on Greek vases as a gift from an older to a younger man or boy.[42]

Perhaps the bird served a double purpose, both as a symbol of 'transition' (including the various stages in the cycle of life) and virility. This double connotation may be reflected in the story of Alectryon, a companion of Ares, whose failure to warn his master (who was having an illicit affair with Aphrodite) of the arrival of Helios resulted in his transformation into a cock. The story, first attested in Lucian (*Gallus* 3), may well be a late one, designed to explain the name and manifold associations of the cock. None of these associations can with certainty be identified in Bronze Age Aegean iconography, though the presence of an altar on the Zakros sealing indicates that the bird could (also) serve some purpose in the religious sphere.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Given the absence of unequivocal evidence for the chicken's role in early Greek religion, it seems prudent to establish whether the bird could have served other, more mundane, purposes in Bronze and Iron Age Greece. Given its importance in later (including modern) European and Near Eastern subsistence systems, it would not be surprising if the ancient Greeks had also appreciated the culinary qualities of the chicken. There is some good evidence to suggest that, with the inception of the Iron Age, the chicken became increasingly important as a source of

[36] See A. Cosentino, 'Persephone's cockerel', in: P. A. Johnston–A. Mastrocinque–S. Papaionannou (eds.), Animals in Greek and Roman Religion and Myth. Proceedings of the Symposium Grumentinum, Grumento Nova, 5–7 June 2013 (2016) 189–212, for a summary of the bird's various functions.

[37] Paus. V 25: 9.

[38] Pl. *Phd.* 118a.

[39] Cosentino art. cit. 192.

[39a] H. Prückner, Die lokrischen Tonpinakes (1968); E. Lissi-Caronna *et al*., I pinakes di Locri Epizefiri: Musei di Reggio Calabria e di Locri, I–III. AttiMemMagnaGrecia ser. IV 1 (1999), 2 (2003), 3 (2007). For the best preserved, Reggio Calabria inv. 21016+60831 (here **pl. 1: 4**), see LIMC IV (1988) 376 no. 50 s.v. Hades (Lindner); Lissi-Caronna *et al.* op. cit. III 427–8 pl. 134.

[40] Cosentino art. cit. 200–01.

[41] See H. Sichtermann, 'Zeus und Ganymed in frühklassischer Zeit', AntK 2, 1959, 10–15; S. Kaempf-Dimitriadu, Die Liebe der Götter in der attischen Kunst des 5. Jahrhunderts. AntK Beih. 11 (1979) 7–12; LIMC IV (1988) 154–69 s.v. Ganymedes (Sichtermann), esp. 156–7, with further refs.

[42] See, e.g., G. Koch-Harnack, Knabenliebe und Tiergeschenke (1983) 63, 97ff. esp. figs. 32, 33, 40; G. Lorenz, Tiere im Leben der alten Kulturen. Schriftlose Kulturen, Alter Orient, Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom (2013) 122. Aristophanes refers to the bird as a gift to boys in *Av*. 705.

protein (both through its meat and its eggs) throughout the Near East.[43] Indeed, the chicken may have been so successful in arid and semi-arid regions that it outperformed the previously ubiquitous pig (which requires much more water), eventually resulting in the latter's status as an outcast and 'unclean' animal. Yet in Greece, there are no indications that the chicken ever played a significant role as a source of food before the Roman conquest. The sole exception may be the chicken bone from Late Bronze Age Ayios Stephanos in Laconia mentioned above, which had numerous cut-marks on it.

A single bone with cut-marks, however, hardly qualifies as evidence for domestic consumption. Indeed, the cut-marks may well have been the result of other activities, including sacrifice. The ubiquity of the bird on the pinakes from Locri may suggest that cocks were living on the temple grounds.[44] Whilst some texts suggest that sacrificing or eating chickens may have been prohibited (for example, for the followers of Pythagoras or those initiated in the mysteries at Eleusis[45]), there are at the same time numerous references to sacrifices of cocks to deities such as Dionysus, Kore, Hermes, and Asclepius from the Classical period onwards.[46] Naturally, those references alone are not sufficient to argue that the bird served a similar purpose in earlier times. If the bird was indeed as rare in Iron Age Greece as the scarcity of finds suggests, it seems unlikely that the cock was regularly used for sacrifice. Yet, at the same time, one has to wonder why one of the first depictions of the bird in Greece, the sealing from Zakros (**fig. 1a**), shows a pair of cocks on either side of an altar. Although this must remain conjecture, it may well be that the Classical perception of the cock as a liminal creature (as a messenger from different realms or harbinger of new phases of life) harked back to earlier, possibly Minoan, times. If so, it may also have been considered a suitable offering to some of the deities with which it was associated in later times, including Kore/Persephone.[47]

COCKS AROUND THE POND

The precise role of the chicken in Bronze and early Iron Age Greece thus cannot be established on the basis of the evidence coming from Greece itself. Yet we may perhaps learn something about the bird's role in society from other contemporary, but better documented, areas. The chicken must have entered Greece via the Near East.[48] As a result, the bird's role in Bronze Age Anatolia, the Levant, and Egypt may well have informed how the ancient Greeks perceived the chicken. It goes beyond the aim of this paper to detail the precise nature of early Greek contacts with these other regions, but in western Anatolia there are clear indications of Greek settlement, whereas there is a growing body of evidence for direct diplomatic contact between the Hittite court (in Central Anatolia) and Mycenaean royalty.[49] Similarly, there are clear indications for

[43] Redding art. cit. (n. 30) 355–7.

[44] Cosentino art. cit. 198.

[45] Cosentino art. cit. 194, with refs.

[46] W. Burkert, Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche (2nd. rev. ed., 2011) 93.

[47] Persephone/Kore was probably known in Mycenaean times, and originally may have been a Minoan deity. Her two names have been tentatively recognized in *pe-re- *82* in Pylos and *ko-wa* in Thebes (TH Fq 126.2): online Oxford Classical Dictionary (2016) s.v. Persephone/Kore' (Jiménez San Cristóbal). Moreover, *wa-na-so-i*, the dative dual of *wanassa*, is known from tablets Fr 1227, 1228, and 1222 from Pylos and can be translated as 'to the two Queens', possibly a reference to Demeter and Kore (see J. Kelder–M. Poelwijk, 'The Wanassa and the Damokoro. A new interpretation of a Linear B text from Pylos', GrRomByzSt 56, 2016, 579). It is conceivable that the famous 'Ivory Trio' from Mycenae (Athens NM inv. Π7711: H. Wace, Ivories from Mycenae, I: The Ivory Trio [1939]; J.-C. Poursat, Catalogue des ivoires mycéniens du Musée National d'Athènes [1977] 20–1 no. 49 pl. 4) represent these two deities with Plutus between them.

[48] See A. Lawler, Why did the Chicken Cross the World? (2014) 37–9. An earlier view that the chicken first entered Europe via Central Asia after a very early domestication in China (B. West– Z. Ben-Xiong, 'Did chickens go north? New evidence for domestication', World's Poultry Science Journal 45, 1989, 205–18) is now considered unlikely: J. Peters *et.al*., 'Holocene cultural history of Red Jungle Fowl (Gallus gallus) and its domestic descendant in East Asia', Quaternary Science Reviews 42, 2016, 102–19.

[49] W. J. I. Waal, 'My brother, a Great King, my peer. Evidence for a Mycenaean kingdom from Hittite texts', in: J. M. Kelder–Waal (eds.), From LUGAL.GAL to wanax. Kingship and political organization in the Late Bronze Age Aegean (2019) 151–60.

the presence of Mycenaean merchants, mercenaries, as well as diplomats in Egypt. A growing body of research suggests that the wealthy inhabitants of the ancient Near East had a lively interest in exotic plants and animals, and that both flora and fauna were exchanged as prestige objects.[50] It thus is entirely conceivable that the chicken spread through the ancient world in a similar way—as part of 'diplomatic mail'.

We know that the chicken had arrived in the Near East by the late 3rd millennium BC at the latest. A. Lawler has convincingly argued that the chicken was probably introduced to Ur III in the context of trade with far-off 'Meluhha', almost certainly the Sumerian designation for what is known as the 'Indus civilization'.[51] Whilst faunal remains of the bird at Indus sites are only sporadically attested, various figurines, as well as a sealing, indicate that the bird was known and, possibly, already used for cock fights.[52] At Lothal, a major trading centre on the western edge of India, chickenlike bones were apparently found in association with a seal from Dilmun (a known stopover in the trade between India and Sumer), as well as bun-shaped copper ingots that have parallels in western Asia.[53] But the clearest evidence for an Indian origin of the chicken is its Mesopotamian name: DARMUŠEN me-luh-ha, the bird from Meluhha. In addition, the term DAR.LUGALMUŠEN, 'the royal bird', which may originally have referred to a male francolin, was soon also used to designate a cock.[54] In its Akkadian derivate *tarlugallu*, the term exclusively referred to the cock.[55]

This rare and exotic bird was, of course, perfect for mythical stories. The bird appears in the Sumerian myth of *Enki and the World Order*, where it is described as wearing a 'carnelian beard': a clear reference to the chicken's wattle.[56] The chicken must have fascinated the Sumerians, for ivory figurines of the 'bird from Meluhha' are recorded in Ur III texts.[57] None of these have been recovered, but E. C. L. During Caspers has tentatively identified a steatite fragment from Mohenjo-daro as a statuette of the bird (**fig. 2**): it may originally have held a carnelian inlay and gives an impression of the figurines that may have been sold at Ur.[58]

Figure 2: Reconstruction of a figurine of a 'bird from Meluhha' from Mohenjo-daro (after During Caspers 1990), 2:3.

Live cocks were also shipped to Mesopotamia, as records from the city of Umma indicate that the bird was the recipient of quantities of wheat[59]—perhaps suggesting an early form of alectryomancy? Yet the bird must have remained a rarity and the preserve of the elite. This is reflected in the archaeozoological record, for I know of no publication of physical remains of the bird from Mesopotamian 3rd-millennium levels. However, recent excavations in Kurdistan have brought to light the remains

[50] See most recently J. M. Kelder, 'Royal Gift Exchange between Mycenae and Egypt: Olives as "Greeting Gifts" in the Late Bronze Age Mediterranean', AJA 113, 2009, 339–52 and M. Pareja, 'Monkey business: New evidence for Aegean-Indus Exchange', The Ancient Near East Today, November 2020, 8/3 (www.asor.org/anetoday/2020/11/monkey-business).

[51] Art. cit. 34–9.

[52] Lawler op. cit. 34, referring to S. R. Clark, The Social Life of Figurines: Recontextualising the Third Millennium BC Terracotta Figurines from Harappa (Pakistan) (2012) 183–261.

[53] Chicken bones: cf. Lawler op. cit. 36; ingots: G. L. Possehl, The Indus Civilization: A Contemporary Perspective (2002) 82.

[54] RIA IV (1972–75) 487 s.v. (Heimpel).

[55] J. P. Peters, 'The Cock,' Journal of the American Oriental Society 33,1913, 363–96.

[56] Lawler op. cit. 39.

[57] L. Legrain, Business documents of the third dynasty of Ur. Ur excavations: Texts III (1937) 747.

[58] E. C. L. During Caspers, '… and multi-coloured birds of Meluhha', in Proceedings of the Seminar for Arabian Studies 20, 1990, 10.

[59] N. Veldhuis, Religion, Literature, and Scholarship. The Sumerian Composition 'Nanse and the Birds' (2004) 235.

of a chicken in a late-3rd-millennium context.[60] Thus, based on both the written evidence and this attestation in the archaeological record, it is now reasonable to assume that the chicken was present in (northern) Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium BC.

Chicken bones have also been reported from late-3rd-millennium levels at Tell Sweyhat in Syria,[61] from where it may have spread further west: chicken remains have also been reported from early-2nd-millennium levels at Tell Hadidi.[62]

The *tarlugallu* is attested in several lexical lists dating from the 19th century BC onwards, but other than the association with royalty in the bird's name, there is little that can be inferred from these texts.[63] The first known representation of the cock (and what may be hens) is on an ivory pyxis from the wealthy Tomb 45 at Assur, dated to the 14th century BC (**fig. 3**; **pl. 2: 1**).[64] The depiction is unique (the bird does not reappear in Mesopotamian imagery before the first millennium BC) and offers a rare insight in how the chicken was perceived. Unsurprisingly, it appears to have been associated with the sun—the circular symbol between the two trees leaves little to the imagination and, in view of its paradisiacal setting, perhaps with concepts of fertility and birth.[65]

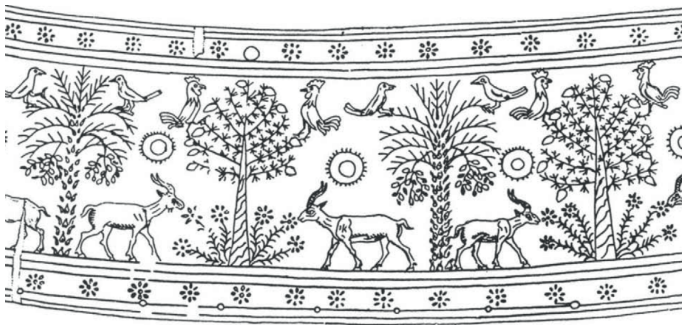

Figure 3: Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum inv. VAAss 01099. Ivory pyxis from tomb 45 at Aššur, drawing by W. Andrae (Courtesy Deutsche Orient-Gesellschaft), 1:2.

Iron Age texts may provide additional detail, though one must be weary of teleological bias: some, perhaps all, of the attested later functions of the bird may have been novelties, with little relation to early traditions. Despite this caveat, some Iron Age texts do seem to preserve earlier traditions. The so-called *Birdcall*, an Akkadian text that has been delivered in various (not always entirely identical) 7th-century BC copies is here of particular interest: precisely because of the ambiguities and even conflicting content of the extant copies, it is possible and even likely that elements hark back to a body of earlier, oral traditions.[66] In the *Birdcall*, the *tarlugallu* is variously linked to the gods Nusku and Enmessara. As such, the cock[67] was associated with (divine) light and fire, but also with concepts of vigilance (in the dark), and the (voyage to) the netherworld.[68] These roles are not incompatible with the bird's apparent earlier association with the sun and,

[60] I am very grateful to Cécile Michel for this information (pers. comm. 2 June, 2022).

[61] H. Buitenhuis, 'The animal remains from Tell Sweyhat, Syria', Palaeohistoria 25, 1983, 131–44.

[62] H. Buitenhuis, 'The faunal remains from Tell Hadidi',: in: M. Kubasiewicz (ed.), Archaeozoology, 1. Proceedings of the 3rd International Archaeozoological Conference held 23–26th April 1978 at the Agricultural Academy Szczecin, Poland (1979) 164–75.

[63] Veldhuis op. cit. 176, 196.

[64] A. Haller (ed.), Gräber und Grüfte von Assur (1954) 123–48 fig. 161. P. O. Harper *et al*. (eds.), Discoveries at Ashur on the Tigris. Assyrian Origins (1995) 83–5 no. 4.

[65] Compare to, e.g., D. Collon, First Impressions: cylinder seals in the ancient Near East (1987) no. 30; E. Porada, 'A subject for continuing conversation', in: J. V. Canby *et. al*. (eds.), Ancient Anatolia: Aspects of Change and Cultural Development. Essays in Honor of Machteld Mellink (1986) 88.

[66] W. G. Lambert, 'The Sultantepe Tablets, IX. The birdcall text', AnSt 20, 1970, 113.

[67] That the texts refer to a cock seems abundantly clear. Its cry, *'tahtatâ ana tutu'* (which can be translated as 'You sinned against Tutu'—a reference to an earlier tradition, in which Enmessara waged war against Enlil), sounds remarkably similar to our *cock–a-doodle-doo* (Lambert art. cit. 111).

[68] Nusku was an important deity and seems to have had a wide range of capacities. He was the vizier and messenger of the supreme god Enlil, and as such was known as *en-gidri*: the 'Lord of the sceptre' (F. A. M. Wiggermann, Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Genootschap Ex Oriente Lux 29, 1985–1986, 10), and he was also a god of fire and light. E. Ehrenberg, 'The Rooster in Mesopotamia' in: Ehrenberg (ed.), Leaving No Stones Unturned. Essays on the Ancient

indeed, they are remarkably similar to some of the cock's connotations in the later Greek world as mentioned above.

By the time of the last deposition in Tomb 45 at Aššur, the bird had also arrived in Anatolia. Although chicken bones are reported at Early Bronze Age Hayaz Höyük on the Lower Euphrates, they may be the result of later intrusions.[69] Towards the end of the Middle Bronze Age, and certainly at the inception of Late Bronze Age, there is secure evidence for *gallus* at Korucutepe.[70] The precise connotation, if there were any, of the chicken in Bronze Age Anatolia remains unclear. The remains of a chicken at early Iron Age Arslantepe were found together and showed no sign of slaughter or other interference, and it has been suggested that this may indicate that the bird was kept in a cage—perhaps for breeding but more likely simply as an exotic commodity.[71]

This may also have been the case in Hittite times, but it is impossible to establish the precise role of the chicken at that time with any certainty. The bird is not securely identified in Hittite texts, though F. Sommer and H. Ehelolf suggested that the MUŠEN.GAL, 'large bird', might be the Hittite designation for the chicken.[72] The identification has not found widespread acceptance, and B. Landsberger instead read 'duck' or perhaps 'goose'.[73] If Sommer and Ehelolf's suggestion holds true, however, then a Kizzuwatnan purification ritual is of particular interest. The text, delivered on KUB 9.22+ (CTH 477H), details how, in preparation for childbirth, two MUŠEN.GAL are sacrificed to purify the birthstool. One of these birds is slaughtered, and its blood is subsequently used to smear the birthstool, whereas the other is apparently sacrificed to otherwise unidentified chthonic gods (?). Y. Feder, though identifying the birds as geese, observed that their function 'can be seen as complementary; the one serves to uproot the evil from the birthstool, the other to transport it to the underworld where its threat will be neutralized'.[74] If the MUŠEN.GAL is indeed the Hittite designation for a cock, its associations with childbirth as well as guiding (in this case, evil) spirits to the netherworld, are remarkably similar to the bird's role not only in contemporary Assyria, but also in the later Greek world.

In Egypt, too, the first specimens of the chicken must have arrived in the 2nd millennium BC. R. Cottevieille-Giraudet identified a graffito on blocks from a Middle Kingdom temple at Medamoud near Thebes as the first known Egyptian depiction of a cock (**fig. 4**).[75] Although his assertion '... dans lequel, après réflexion, il ne nous semble pas possible d'hésiter à reconnaître un coq'[76] may be overly certain, the general pose of the bird, the designation of the feathers (both around the neck and the tail), as well as the apparent depiction of a comb, do argue in favour of such an identification. There is no indication of a wattle, however, which may indicate that we are dealing here with a hen rather than a cock.

Near East and Egypt in Honor of Donald P. Hansen (2002) 57, argued that the rooster may have signified light—perhaps celestial light, as embodied by Nusku—, but the bird may well have had a more generic connotation for vigilance in the dark (cf. S. Parpola, 'The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy', JNES 52/3, 1993, 198). For a survey of attestations and functions of Nusku, see RIA IX (1998) 629–33 s.v. (Streck). The cock is also associated with Enmessara—a chthonic deity attested from the Ur III period onwards—in various Neo-Assyrian texts. Though these date to the 9th to 7th centuries BC, it is likely that there were antecedents (W. G. Lambert, Babylonian creation myths [2013] 287).

[69] H. Buitenhuis, 'Preliminary report on the faunal remains of Hayaz Hüyük from the 1974–1983 seasons', Anatolica 12, 1985, 61–74.

[70] J. Boessneck–A. von den Driesch, 'Tierknochenfunde vom Korucutepe bei Elazig in Ostanatolien', in: M. N. van Loon (ed.), Korucutepe: Final Report on the Excavations of the Universities of Chicago, California (Los Angeles) and Amsterdam in the Keban Reservoir, Eastern Anatolia, 1968–1970 (1974) 109, 112.

[71] G. Siracusano–F. Manuelli–M. Masseti, 'When did roosters start singing at Arslantepe? A preliminary assessment of the presence and spread of Gallus gallus (Linnaeus, 1758) in Iron Age Eastern Anatolia', Anthropozoologica 56.16, 2021, 245.

[72] Das hethitische Ritual des Pāpanikri von Komana (Kbo V1=Bo 2001). Text, Übersetzungsversuch, Erläuterungen (1924) 64.

[73] 'Einige unerkannt gebliebene oder verkannte Nomina des Akkadischen', WO 3, 1966, 260.

[74] In: Y. Cohen–A. Gilan–J. L. Miller (eds.), Pax Hethitica. Studies on the Hittites and their Neighbours in Honour of Itamar Singer (2010) 107.

[75] Fouilles de Medamoud, VIII.2. La verrerie, les graffiti (1931) 41–3, 74 pl. 8: 42 (no measurements given).

[76] Op. cit. 64.

Figure 4: Temple of Medamoud, graffito (drawing by author after Cottevieille-Giraudet 1931), not to scale.

As Cottevieille-Giraudet remarked, the graffito must have been made whilst the temple was still in use, before being dismantled and its stones reused in the foundation of a new temple during the reign of Thutmoses III. One can thus infer that the bird was probably known in Egypt soon after the inception of the New Kingdom at the latest. Cottevieille-Giraudet suggested that the exotic bird may have been gifted to the god (Montu) during the Middle Kingdom. This is possible, but given the fact that the graffito can hardly be considered as a 'formal' record of the bird, it seems likely that it was visible to the 'common people' at a time when the temple had, apparently, fallen into disrepair or out of use (how else could one have scratched so many graffiti into the temple walls?)—perhaps during the upheavals of the Second Intermediate Period. In such a context, the bird may have come to the South from (or may have been seen by a southerner in) the Hyksos-dominated North: a logical route, given the Hyksos' Levantine connections, and the rise of Avaris as the largest city and trading centre of the Mediterranean.[77] Regardless of such considerations, it is clear that the bird must have been a rare sight.

The exotic character of the bird is attested to in the Annals of Thutmoses III. Carved into the walls of the great temple at Karnak, they relate how the king received tribute from various potentates whilst on campaign in the northern Levant—the name of the specific country has sadly been lost, but it is mentioned between Retenu (Canaan and Syria) and Sngr (Babylonia).[78] The event took place in the king's 38th regnal year, i.e. *c*.1441 BC, and amongst the gifts that were brought to the King were four birds 'that lay eggs every day'. The keyword 'ms', to give birth/lay eggs, is a restoration, but one that is almost certain. Because of that, the identity of the four birds is clear: these must have been chickens.[79] The chicken's egg-laying capabilities clearly amazed the ancient Egyptians, who hitherto were only familiar with local waterfowl such as geese (who only lay eggs in the spring).

Interestingly, the bird may also appear on a near-contemporary wall-painting in the tomb-chapel of Rekhmire, a vizier who served both Thutmoses III and his successor Amenhotep II.[80] Rekhmire's tomb-chapel (TT 100) is famous for its depiction of foreign 'tribute bearers', some of whom are reported to have come from Keftiu (the Egyptian designation for Minoan Crete).[81] One of the metal vessels that is presented by these foreigners takes the shape of a bird's head, and both W. M. Müller and P. R. Lowe have argued that it represents a cock.[82] Lowe bases this identification on a drawing from G. A. Hoskin's 1835 *Travels in Ethiopia* (*non vidi*). It appears

[77] Cf. C. Broodbank, The Making of the Middle Sea. A History of the Mediterranean from the Beginning to the Emergence of the Classical World (2013) 833–4.

[78] J. B. Coltherd, 'The domestic fowl in ancient Egypt', Ibis 108.2, 1966, 219–20 (with further refs.).

[79] P. F. Houlihan, The Birds of Ancient Egypt. The Natural History of Egypt, vol. 1 (1986) 80. *Pace* J. Peters *et al*., 'The biocultural origins and dispersal of domestic chickens', Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America 119/24, 2022, 4. To argue that it is unlikely that the Annals of Thutmoses III refer to chickens 'since the zooarchaeological record indicates that chickens were not present in contemporaneous Mesopotamia' and that these birds must thus have been ducks or geese—both well known in Egypt for centuries and thus entirely unremarkable—really does come perilously close to conflating the absence of (purely osteological) evidence with evidence of absence.

[80] J. Vercoutter, L'Egypte et le monde égéen préhellénique (1965) 260.

[81] J. Quack, 'Kft3w und i3śy', Ägypten und Levante 6, 1996, 77–9.

[82] W. M. Müller, Asien und Europa nach altägyptischen Denkmälern (1893) 348 (*non vidi,* referred to by P. R. Lowe, 'A further note on the data when the domestic fowl was first known to the ancient Egyptians', Ibis 4, 1934, 379–80.

that the original has since then suffered (quite possibly as a result of visiting tourists, but probably also because the chapel was used to keep livestock), for little of the alleged cock remains in the colour copy by Nina de Garis Davies (**pl. 2: 2**).[83] Though it is perfectly possible that Cretan metalworkers were inspired by the rare bird, the identification must therefore remain tentative.

A cock can with certainty be identified on a silver bowl from Tell Basta—set amidst a pot-pourri of rustic scenes, which includes a man herding a group of domesticated (?) ostriches (**pl. 2: 3**). Many of these motifs are uncommon on metalware, though a number can be compared to (partly Old Kingdom) tomb decorations. Though the bowl is thus distinct from other Egyptian metal bowls, it may be dated to the mid-13th century BC, that is, the reign of Ramesses II.[84] There can be little doubt as to the identification of the cock on this vessel: the bird's comb and elongated tailfeathers are unmistakable. Indeed, C. Lilyquist compares the bird to the cock on the pyxis from Assur.[85] Its presence on the silver bowl from Tell Basta may likewise indicate an association with fertility and rejuvenation, or to some sort of idyllic (after)life (there are hunting scenes on the bowl, too). A similar meaning may perhaps be ascribed to a drawing on a large ceramic fragment described by H. Carter which was apparently found in an undisturbed late-18th- to 20th-dynasty stratum in the Valley of the Kings (**pl. 2: 4**).[86] Alternatively, the bird's vigilant nature may have also rendered it a suitable figure as a protector of the valley, or as a symbol for the cycle of the sun. Attributing a specific connotation to the bird, however, must largely remain conjecture, and it may be safest to assume that the bird was first and foremost an exotic beast from the East, and a token of wealth and foreign connections.

Indeed, it seems likely that the bird's sheer rarity was part of its appeal. It must be significant that the bird is exclusively attested in association with the very highest echelons of the Egyptian state (as part of tribute to the Pharaoh, on the walls of a vizier's tomb-chapel as part of foreign tribute, as a graffito on a temple wall, on a sherd from the Valley of the Kings, or as part of an idyllic scene on a silver bowl), but never—neither in texts nor in faunal records or in the iconography—as part of day-to-day life in Egypt until the 4th century BC.[87] Indeed, it cannot be a coincidence that the ancient Egyptians did not have a specific word for the bird, whereas its successor language, Coptic, used the patently Greek loanword *alektoar* for cock.[88] It seems most likely that the bird, although it was not entirely unknown, was never really bred in Bronze and Iron Age Egypt, and that the few specimens that were to be seen pecking along the shores of the Nile were always imported. Although the designation for the country that brought the 4 hens to Thutmoses III is unfortunately lost, its position in between 'Syria' and 'Babylonia' suggests that we should be looking towards northern Mesopotamia (Assyria?), where the bird at that time was evidently known, or perhaps even further East, to Iran.[89]

[83] N. de Garis Davies, Paintings from the Tomb of Rekh-mi-rē at Thebes (1935) pl. 2.

[84] C. Lilyquist, 'Treasures from Tell Basta: Goddesses, Officials, and Artists in an International Age', MetrMusJ 47, 2012, 28, 38.

[85] Art. cit. 38 n. 171.

[86] H. Carter, 'An Ostracon Depicting a Red Jungle-Fowl (the Earliest Known Drawing of the Domestic Cock)', JEA 9.1/2, 1923, 1–4 pl. 20: 1.

[87] From the 4th century onwards, so-called 'Egyptian egg ovens' are known to have been used to hatch chicken eggs; Aristotle probably refers to this in his *Hist. An.* (VI 2).

[88] I have been unable to find a satisfactory etymology for Coptic *anapai*, 'hen', and *erjw*, 'chicken'.

[89] Coltherd (art. cit. 220) already suggested that, following the decline of the Harappa civilization in the 2nd millennium BC (which he still attributed to 'Aryan' conquest), the chicken may have been obtained through overland trade-networks, that is, routes through Iran. It is likely that Media (north-western Iran) was an important source for the bird throughout the Iron Age, and it may already have had that role in the Late Bronze Age. In a list detailing the conquests in that region by Tiglath-pileser III, an Assyrian king who ruled *c.*745–727 BC, the land Ariarma (KUR.a-ri-ar-mi) is followed by KUR DAR.LUGAL.MEŠ. MUŠEN, the land of roosters; apparently the local designation for newly conquered territory (S. Yamada, 'Inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III: Chronographic-Literary Styles and the King's Portrait', Orient 49, 2014, 36).

CONCLUSIONS

We have seen that the chicken was, by the 3rd millennium BC at the latest, already known and kept in Mesopotamia. There, it was associated with its land of origin, Meluhha, but the cock was also known as the 'King's Bird', DAR. LUGAL.LU, and *tarlugallu*. Its precise role in Mesopotamian (i.e., Sumerian, and later Assyrian) society is unclear, but given its name, it can be reasonably assumed that it served as a status symbol, and was the preserve of the King (and those around him). If later traditions are anything to go by, the bird may have been sacred to the deities Nusku and Enmessara, and was thus associated with divine light, vigilance, and the night, as well as the netherworld—all of these functions can be compared to later Greek traditions. At Assur, however, the single depiction of the bird on the pyxis from Tomb 45 rather suggests that the chicken was associated with the sun (a logical connection), and perhaps with concepts of fertility and rejuvenation (given the bird's paradisiac surroundings and because the pyxis seems to show both the cock (with its solar associations) and the hen (because of its egg-laying qualities a logical symbol for fertility).

From Mesopotamia, the bird must have gradually spread north. As noted, it is now attested in Kurdistan in the late 3rd millennium, and archaeology confirms its presence in Anatolia from at least the mid-2nd millennium BC onwards, if not earlier. The bird is not securely identified in Hittite texts. If, however, the chicken is indeed the 'large bird' in the Kizzuwatnan ritual, it may have had a role as guide to the netherworld (to some extent similar to Mesopotamian traditions), whereas its role in the process of childbirth may perhaps be compared to later Greek tradition. In Egypt, the cock is far better attested in the iconography than anywhere else in the ancient Near East, yet its presence in the texts remains limited to a single mention in the Annals of Thutmoses III. Little can be said with certainty about the connotations the cock may have carried in Ancient Egypt: it certainly was an exotic creature, and as such presumably a status symbol. If Cottevieille-Giraudet was right in assigning the graffito of a cock at Medamoud to the Middle Kingdom, and if the bird was indeed sacred to that temple's resident deity Montu—the Theban god of War—, then a comparison with the bird's later association with the Greek god Ares lies at hand (though it seems easier to ascribe the presence of the cock in Thebes to the expansion of the Hyksos during the Second Intermediate Period). Perhaps the sherd from the Valley of the Kings may similarly be seen as an allusion to the bird's watchful nature—to 'defend' the tombs of the kings. Or perhaps it served as an emblem for the sun's cycle; after all, the deceased Pharaoh was thought to travel through the underworld with the Sun. At the same time, the cock on the silver bowl from Tell Basta may have been an emblem for a blissful (after)life. In the absence of written evidence, it remains difficult to gauge anything about the role that the bird may or may not have had in Egypt, and, indeed, throughout much of the Late Bronze Age Near East. It is quite possible that it was perceived in myriad ways throughout the region, and associated with a number of deities and qualities—the same appears to have been the case in the later Greek world.

What can be said with certainty, however, is that the bird was known across the entire region throughout the Middle and Late Bronze Age. Indeed, the chicken's introduction to Mesopotamia was the result of trade between Meluhha and the upper echelons at Ur: its very name (DAR. LUGAL MUŠEN; later *tarlugallu* for cocks) clearly identifies the cock as a creature that was associated with royalty. As such, it is entirely appropriate that chickens were presented as 'tribute' to Thutmoses III; what better gift to present to a Great King (LUGAL.GAL) than the King's bird? We know that Minoan Crete had long-standing trade relations with the Near East, and with Egypt in particular. For the Bronze Age Cretans, it would be entirely logical to adopt Near Eastern symbols of royalty (or more generically, symbols of 'prestige') and use these not only in the production of internationally tradable goods such as metal vases but also on their own seals. Given the lifelike qualities of its depiction on the sealing from Zakros and later on Mycenaean vessels, it is clear that the bird made its way to the Minoan and Mycenean world. This notion may be supported by the faunal remains from a range of Late Bronze Age Aegean sites, even

though the reliability of this dataset must now be considered with some caution. As I have argued above, there is every reason to assume that the bird remained in Greece following the collapse of the Bronze Age societies, and that its near-absence in the archaeological record is the result of inadequate sampling methods, rather than a reflection of historical reality. The chicken may well have gained popularity, acquired new connotations, and arrived in greater numbers, as a result of Greek interaction with the expanding Persian empire (where the cock was associated with Zoroaster). Yet it was not a novelty. In short, the chicken crossed the Mediterranean already in the second millennium BC and entered the Greek world not as a result of Persian expansion in the 6th century BC, but more than a thousand years earlier, as a result of trade with the Near East.

1. Athens, Kerameikos inv. 150. Lebes on high pedestal (photo courtesy J.-P. Descœudres), 1:6.

2. London, BM 1860.2-1.18 (A 1352). Early Corinthian olpe (photo courtesy Trustees of the British Museum), 1:3.

3. New York, Metr. Mus. Late Corinthian alabastron acc. no. 41.162.57 (photo Courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art), 1:3.

4. Reggio Calabria, Mus. Arch. Naz. inv. 21016+60831. Terracotta pinax from Locri, Sanctuary of Persephone (photo Wikipedia, public domain), 1:3.

1. Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum inv. VAAss 01099. Ivory pyxis from tomb 45 at Aššur (photo O. M. Tessmer, courtesy Staatliche Museen zu Berlin), 1:2.

2. Thebes, Rekh-mi-rē's tomb-chapel (TT 100). Frieze of foreign 'tribute bearers', detail: metal vessel in the shape of a bird's head. After de Garis Davies 1935, colour copy by Nina de Garis Davies with drawing by Hoskin in *Travels in Ethiopia* (1843) superimposed; not to scale.

3. New York, Metr. Mus. acc. no. 07.228.20, Rogers Fund, 1907. Silver bowl from Tell Basta (photo courtesy Metropolitan Museum of Art), detail (inset) at scale 1:1.

4. Whereabouts unknown. Late New Kingdom ceramic sherd from the Valley of the Kings (after Carter 1923), 1:3.