

CULT OF BULL AND THE ASPECTS OF ITS MANIFESTATION IN INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

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Abstract. The subject of our research is the interdisciplinary aspects of the cult of the bull, supported by various fields of humanities. Until now, researchers have examined the topic of the bull cult from specific perspectives, but in this case, we aim to address the issue from the viewpoint of interdisciplinary boundaries between different sciences. This article highlights the fascinating manifestations of the bull cult in folklore, myths, and legends, as well as in ethnography, archaeology, and toponymy. To fully portray its existence, we broadly explore diverse artifacts from different periods found in the material culture of the expansive regions of the Caucasus and the Near East.

Keywords: Linguistics, Archaeology, Bull Cult, Etymology.

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Introduction. The mythological world of the peoples of the world, including the ancient Georgian one, is particularly rich in data related to the bull. Myths usually have a long history and store a great deal of material because interest in myths has been significant at every stage of history and will remain so. Myths have great aesthetic potential, which allows for the use of mythical motifs and archetypes in various forms in literary art. At the same time, a myth is not a purely sacred text that would be impossible to touch or alter in even the slightest way. (Nasaridze, 2017, p. 1). There is hardly any people whose development at a certain stage did not reflect an abundant depiction of the animal world in their religion or art. It is known that before gods were depicted in anthropomorphic forms in human imagination, they were represented in zoomorphic forms. People sought to keep gods represented as animals close to them and also depict them in material culture. As a result, various cultures have preserved a wide variety of depictions, with the bull being one of the most relevant and widespread.

Review of Sources/Literature. Interest in the topic has been evident since the last century. The issue was studied from specific perspectives by Georgian and foreign researchers: Iv. Javakhishvili, N. Berdzenishvili, S. Qavchishvili, Al. Robakidze, G. Chitaia, O. Jafaridze, D. Khakhutaishvili, A. Inashvili, A. Kakhidze, Z. Tandilava, V. Bardavelidze, A. Akhvlediani, D. Fraser, F. Kiumoni, M. and N. Tieres, and others. It is particularly noteworthy that certain animals, especially those that played a significant role in human economic life, were revered as sacred objects. The bull was one such animal, and we will present a range of data from various fields and try to portray it with a diverse palette. (For interdisciplinary research, see our article: N. Akhvlediani, N. Inaishvili, 2024:174-178; N. Akhvlediani, M. Puturidze). (N. Akhvlediani, N. Inaishvili, 2024) (N. Akhvlediani, M. Puturidze, 2020).

Methodology: Based on the goals of the research, we initially began collecting source material according to local-dialectal data descriptions. We critically approached existing scientific views. During the search process, we generalized all specific and concrete reasoning by comparing it with the available scientific literature. Through scientifically justified research and interpretation, we analyzed the obtained results. While working on the article, we also applied descriptive, analytical, and historical-comparative methods.

Discussion/Results. The bull is one of the main characters in ancient mythology (Akhvlediani A. , 1964, pp. 21-22). We find the preserved myths and legends about the bull to be of particular interest, as they were considered significant and preserved by researchers in their archives. We present the following from them: According to the recorded legends still available today, the narrator says: We used to allow the bull to rest on Fridays. In ancient times, when God yoked the bull, it would roam freely until it became tired. Wherever it stopped, a boundary was drawn there. When the tired bull shed a tear, it would fall to the ground, and where the tear landed, a bean plant would sprout – marking the boundary. After that, the bull was given one or two days of rest each week. The material was recorded by A. Akhvlediani. The speaker-informant: from K. Gogitidze, in the village of Tskhemvani, in 1962 (Bskifa, 1962, p. 3).

Such legends have been recorded in the village of Vernebi, and also in Khino, by T. Sakhokia in „Bugha-Golshi-C.“ Their main location, as we see, is defined by the mountains of Adjara-Arsiani, although we also have a Georgian variant under the pseudonym of Pshavlashvili: In ancient times, the area of present-day Kakheti was once a sea, which had come from some other sea and settled in Kakheti. The reason for the sea's drying up is explained by the following legend: when the sea stood in Kakheti, Saint George of Bochorma (a place in Kakheti) had a bull's calf, who would sometimes disappear and return with bloody horns. It is said that the calf was battling a sea serpent that had come from the sea. When Saint George's people (the inhabitants, the congregation...) heard of this, they adorned the bull's horns with diamonds. The serpent could not withstand the touch of the diamond-encrusted horns and was defeated in the battle. It was so badly defeated that it fell and, in its fear, slid so strongly into the sea that it couldn't stop itself. It crashed into the hill that stretches along the end of Shiraki (a pasture, a place in Kakheti), between two rivers, where the Alazani and Lori now rustle, and the sea was retained there. The serpent collided exactly with this hill and broke it apart. As a result, the sea receded, and Kakheti was freed from the water. The population descended and settled the land. (“Iveria”, 1894).

According to the Adjarian folklore, in the lake there is sometimes a serpent-like creature, but in most cases, there is a bull – the inhabitant of the lake, which fights, wrestles with the villagers' bull/bulls and defeats them. The villagers' bulls, exhausted and hungry, would return home, and the frustrated owners would often put copper swords on their bulls' horns, as a result of which the latter would defeat the lake's inhabitant – the bulls. As a result „The lake rises and floods the area“, Often, the entire village is abandoned, and what remains is the deserted settlement – Vernebi. Popular etymology explains the name of the village of Vernebi in this way. However, Verana/Vernebi is common in this region, and their abandonment dates back to a relatively recent historical period (Tandilava, 1978, p. 64). According to almost all the legends, after the lake's bull is defeated by the metal weapon made by humans (iron, copper, or diamond), the area is eventually reclaimed. Even in completely clear weather, a heavy downpour (storm) will come and flood everything nearby, but if there is no owner nearby, a different punishment awaits: 'his seed will no longer remain,' meaning it will pass without an heir, and the surname will virtually disappear. As a result of the bull's (or serpent's) death in the water, similar events are not only verified in Georgian reality. According to J. Frazer, the native Aramungs of central Australia, whose totem animal is the whale, believe that the killing of this creature will bring them great misfortune. Therefore, they pray to it and offer sacrifices (Frazer, 1929: 9, 18-20). As we can see, the blacksmith not only prays and offers a sacrifice to the 'sacred bull,' but through the tamed bull, he

delivers a deadly blow, and the result, as we know, is severe. It is known that a raised hand against the ‘sacred bull,’ or the deified bull, is severely punished. Analogies exist: ‘Indeed, the gods severely punished Cambyses (the Persian king) when he killed the holy bull Apis in Egypt during his campaign (524 BC), while the Egyptians were celebrating it’ (Kaukhchishvili, 1961, p. 263).

In the villages of Shavsheti, they also tell tales about the bull that lives in the lake. Variations of this story can be found in various regions of Georgia. Among them, in the lands of the Chorokhi, a similar story was recorded in Shavsheti: „There was a bull and a girl in the lake. The girl had braids that reached her waist. At the same time, in the village of Mikeleti, there was boiling water, so hot that it throws stones out, bubbling, and no one can approach the lake. This water gives a child to a childless woman.“ (Phaghava, M., Tsintsadze, M., Baramidze, M., 2022, p. 319)

Let’s recall the ancient epic „Gilgamesh“: Gilgamesh was attracted to the goddess of love, Ishtar. Gilgamesh rejects her affection. Offended, Ishtar asks the god Anus to create a celestial bull to destroy the arrogant (conceited) Gilgamesh. His father granted her wish, sent the mythical bull, and sent it to his son. The celestial bull arrived at the Euphrates. It drank seven gulps and caused the river to dry up. (Kiknadze Z., 1963: 51-52).

However, Enkidu, who was thrilled by his victory (having defeated the bull), verbally insulted the mourning goddess and even threw the dead bull’s horns at her. Ishtar climbed to the top of the wall of Uruk and cursed Gilgamesh. She tore off the bull’s horns and threw them.

In an earlier fairy tale recorded and published by J. Nogaideli, there is a story about a gigantic bull whose „hind legs were in Khulo, and its front legs were in Kakheti.“ When this giant bull is eaten by an equally giant bird, a single horn remains, „and when it falls, the village shakes“ (Nogaideli, 1971, p. 110). There are other versions of the earthquake caused by the bull, according to which the Earth is on the bull’s horn, and the bull, bothered by a persistent fly, shakes its head, causing the Earth to quake. This tale is more Eastern in origin and is considered to have entered Georgia via Turkish routes (Gordlevsky, 1909, p. 97).

Literary-Written Monuments: A peculiar reflection of the bull cult can be found in the literary-written monuments in the episodes describing the deluge. In Basil Zarzmeli’s „The Life of Serapion,“ we read:

When Saint Serapion went out to build the church, he and those accompanying him went toward a gorge called „Dzindze“ (a toponym). The saint looked around and saw a lake to the east. They told him: „This is a very large and deep lake, called ‘Satakhvne’ (Thakhvi – Satakhvne), full of rats . The next day, as they were preparing to leave, an earthquake occurred, and the surrounding area shook. To the west, near the lake, a rock split in two. This rock was called „Zarzma,“ as it caused fear among those present (“Zarzma“ comes from the Georgian word „zanzari“ (shudder); „ (Our Treasure, 1960, pp. 99-107-113).

Here, just like in the legends, in the lake (Khino), „a rock split“ and the water flooded everything „with tremors and groans.“ The reason for the lake’s overflow is not mentioned in this monument, and Basil Zarzmeli does not need it. What is important, however, is that „the lake was full of rats“ . (Thakhvi (rat) – a large, fur-covered rodent). Therefore, it follows that the lake did not overflow without reason: rats are forcing the bull to leave the lake. The result of this is well known.

We will bring data from another literary monument. Stefane Mtbevari, in his „The Suffering of Gobron“, describes an event that happened, saying: A large number of people were trapped in Adjara and Shavsheti (captured). The bull was associated with the sacred animal. Its two horns are compared to the saints in the Gospel, two sisters (Mariam and Martha). (Our Treasure, 1960, p. 90).

At the same time, during the construction of churches in these regions (Oshki, Shkhaltha, and others), the famous Bolok Basil, as we read in the work of Abuseridze Tbeli, is helped by a mystical bull „which does not need to be guided“ and carries the construction materials by itself. The same is confirmed in the folkloric texts recorded in this area, which were recorded and analyzed by Prof. M. Chikovani (Chikovani, 1944), According to the 1233 manuscript of Abuseridze Tbeli’s story, near Opiza, a certain Basil or by the nickname Bolok Basil, is conducting the construction, and his assistants are an bull and a private donkey with the help of Saint George. According to the 1937 folkloric record, two

brothers are building the monastery of Safari, and one bull brings the materials for them, without the need for guidance, just like Bolok Basil's bull. We will provide one passage: 1.V.№51. „Basil, during the construction of the miraculous church, was also using a bull alongside a donkey.“

A person has two types of relationships with animals: with domesticated and with wild ones. In other words, one type of animal is tamed and domesticated, while the other remains untamed, wild, and foreign. The domesticated animal is obedient to its owner and is engaged in a „master-servant“ (vassal) relationship with the human. The animal serves its owner, and the owner protects it. The owner is responsible for the animal's health, and the animal serves him in return. Humans and domesticated animals serve each other in different ways. One tale tells: After the creation of the world, God challenged the deer and the bull to race – whoever could run to the sky faster, humans would choose that one. The deer rushed headlong and soared. But it became exhausted from the running and died. Only its tracks remained in the sky as the „deer's leap.“ The bull, however, moved steadily, head lowered, looking toward the ground, showing in advance what its purpose was. It reached its destination late but arrived healthy and tireless. Its tracks, too, were left in the sky as the „bull's trail.“ After this, God blessed the bull, bowed in gratitude, and said that it would carry the burden of serving humanity (Koteishvili, 1960, p. 328)

The Cult of the Ox in Ethnography: The ancient belief systems and representations about large domesticated animals, specifically in the belief „bosloba,“ (celebration) suggest that the god initially represented an animal being. Among domesticated large-hoofed cattle, the bull was likely deified among Georgians (Bardavelidze 103)

In one of the burial sites in the Trialeti region, a large wooden cart with four eyes was found, which was used „to lay the deceased to rest in their eternal dwelling, and the oxen that were yoked to the cart were slaughtered there as well“ (Gobejishvili, 1952, pp. 68,95). Could this sample represent a transformation described by Ap. Rodoseli, who said about the Colchians that „they place the bodies in ox hides and hang them outside the city on oxen (Rodoseli, 1948, p. 116) Or, according to later sources, specifically from the 17th century (1629), when M. Tamarashvili described the activities of Catholic missionaries in Georgia: „Then the priest took me,“ says Patriarch Ivan, „and showed me their dead, who were laid out on high poles in rotted trees. These trees had holes at the top and bottom for air to enter and for external viewing, so that the deceased could be seen clearly. Because of this, the Tatar merchants do not buy honey from this country, as they believe the bees come from these corpses.“ (Tamarashvili, 1902, p. 144) According to one legend, which has been verified by Al. Robakidze in his article that a bee comes out of a calf's body (Robakidze, 1960, p. 32; 198). The motif of the origin of bees from the carcass of a bull or its blood was quite common. According to some observations, it must come from Egypt, where it seems to have been the custom to trample the calf with the foot of the bee in order to produce a new bee. (Sayffert, 1930, p. 161).

The origin of various useful plants and animals from the carcass of an ox is also attested elsewhere. In his article „*The Mysteries of Mithras*,“ Franz Kümon writes about how Mithras killed a raging ox, and then from the dead ox's body emerged remarkable herbs and plants, while from its brain came bread and from its blood came grapes (Kumon, 1929, p. 64). This naive tale leads us to the origins of human culture.

The bull in Onomastics Patronymic or family names derived from the root „khari“ (a bull) are still quite common in present-day Georgia (Janaishia, 1959, pp. 128-129). For example, names like Kharadze, Kharabadze, Kharayishvili, Makharadze, Makharobidze, and others can be found. As for toponyms, geographical place names related to bulls are abundant: Khartakhevi – a place of pasture in the village of Khala (Bskifa, 1962, p. 45); Kurvai – a place name in Zeraboseli (Bskifa, 1962, pp. №9 (3); 38, 51); Sakharia – a mountain in Shavsheti (Phaghava, M., Tsintsadze, M., Baramidze, M., 2022, p. 148). The root of the name appears to be khari, with affixes: -ia.

As for the motivation behind these toponyms, they are places intended for bulls. Kharisatsoli – a pasture for bulls; Khariyathaghi – an bull's stall (compare: toponym Kharisatsoli); Bugavri – a

geographical place name in the village of Gorgadzebi, village Khala, Kobuleti Municipality (Bskifa, 1962, pp. №9 (3), 38, 51), Okhodjiri – village in Upper Achi, Kobuleti Municipality (Bskifa, 1962, pp. 8, № 107).

Regarding this toponym, it is possible to assume that the root is khodz', which in Megrelian-Chan language means ox (Chikobava, 1938, p. 78). In this toponym, we can identify affixes for derivation: prefix-suffix o-ir, similar to the toponym Obodir. It is a Zan (Megrelian-Chan) derived toponym, and it might signify Sakhare (Akhvlediani N, 2009, p. 61). Cf. Khariyathaghi – an ox stall, in the villages of Matskvalta and Mtaginuri (Shuakhevi Municipality).

Data on the Cult of the Bull Revealed in Archaeological Sites. The existence of archaeological data depicting the cult of the bull is indisputably confirmed in the ancient cultures of Mesopotamia, the Caucasus, and other regions. This indicates that the bull played a significant role in the daily lives of various ethnic groups, which, in turn, speaks to its multifaceted nature in terms of function, symbolism, and the ideas it represented. This is why it appears in different fields: language, mythology, folklore, toponymy, ethnopractice, and material culture artifacts.

In material culture, it is based on purely factual data and manifests itself in various types of materials and textures: primarily clay, stone, metal, bone, and even semi-precious stones. Examples made from the latter two materials have been confirmed in the Near East region. In the Caucasus, small artifacts made of clay, stone, and metal are predominantly found. These artifacts appear in different chronological periods, which, of course, undergo stylistic and technical changes, as would be expected from the natural development dynamics. Bull representations are found in both the southern and northern regions of the Caucasus, dating from the early prehistoric period through the developed Middle Ages, where they are depicted in temple architecture in the form of bas-reliefs.

Data from Eastern Georgia: In some Chalcolithic period sites, stylized bull representations are already present, mainly due to the distinct depiction of the horns. For instance, three clay figures were found in a layer dated to the Late Chalcolithic period at the Oirchosi settlement (Gambashidze, 2018, pp. 74-84, Abb. 5 17). Naturally, in this agricultural culture, the creation of such animal figures is not surprising, as they had already domesticated animals. However, it should be noted that the number of such figures is still limited.

As is known, the existence of the bull cult is directly related to the significant and unconditional advancement of agriculture and agrarian practices among the local population of South Caucasus, most clearly evident since the Early Bronze Age. This is linked to the emergence of the Kura-Araxes culture in this area and beyond, particularly to the south in regions where this culture spread widely. The Kura-Araxes culture is a leading indicator of agricultural practices for this population. Agriculture holds special significance and importance in their daily lives, with everything being connected to this activity in the Kura-Araxes culture. The development of this field was particularly advanced by the first appearance of bronze metallurgy in the Early Bronze Age, which ensured the effectiveness of agricultural tools.

The simultaneous appearance of artifacts related to the bull cult and its significance is recorded in the Kura-Araxes culture. These include: clay bull figurines, stylized representations of bull horns on artistic bronze items (specifically on the decorative heads of pins), models of carts made from clay and wood, bull-horned pedestals, and even models of cart wheels, directly indicating the use of such materials in agrarian practices. In this process, the bull would naturally have a priority role. Therefore, the emergence of the bull cult, with its symbolic significance, also indicates its special function in the development of agriculture.

The production of two-wheeled carts and the creation of carts from hardwood material would have been inconceivable without the use of metal tools. It was the appearance of bronze metallurgy that, on one hand, facilitated the production of bronze agricultural tools (and other categories of artifacts), and on the other hand, its active use in various aspects of daily life. For the effective use of these innovations, which retained their leading role in the dynamics of subsequent epochs, it was essential to

have a driving force. It is believed that in the beginning, oxen were the driving force, and later, the bull emerged (Mirtskhulava G. , 2010, p. 105). Therefore, the simultaneous appearance of wheeled transport (carts, cart models, and wheel models) and representations of the bull in the later phase of the Kura-Araxes culture points to a turning point in agriculture. Researchers, based on the widespread use of wheeled transport for various purposes, and the uniformity of the massive wheel construction in its early stages, believe that the idea of this invention must have diffused from its place of origin to other regions (Child, 1956, p. 358), with the area between northern Mesopotamia and the Caucasus considered as the diffusion zone. Moreover, various researchers propose different possible routes for the spread of wheeled transport, as detailed by T. Gamkrelidze and V. Ivanov in their fundamental monograph on the Indo-Europeans. Among the potential routes, they indicate the following regions: primarily, the Near East – Asia Minor – the Balkans – Western Europe; the Near East – the Caucasus – the northern Black Sea region – Western Europe; also, from the eastern Caspian coast to the Volga region and further east to India and China (Gamkrelidze, 1984, p. 734). It is notable that the role of the Caucasus in the spread of wheeled transport in Europe is particularly emphasized, based on the analysis that wagons from Eastern Europe dating to the 2nd millennium BCE were made from wood originating in the Caucasus (Kuzmina, 1980, p. 12). The earliest miniature model of a two-wheeled cart was discovered in Georgia, in the Tianeti region at the Badani Early Bronze Age settlement, in a so-called agricultural pit filled with various ceramic materials (Japaridze O. , 1992), Tab. LXVIII)[Tab. I, 1]. It appears to have had a rather complex construction, and the confirmed special assembly holes on the cart indicate that it had a yoke and was mounted on an axle-wheel system (Mirtskhulava G. , 2010, p. 106). Naturally, in this agrarian practice, the pulling force would have been a bull. So far, this is the only miniature but complete model of a cart in the Caucasus. Bull depictions and stylized images of two-wheeled carts are known from the Sakhkere settlement, particularly from the Bronze Age №13 burial of the Nacherkezi site (Japaridze O, 1955, p. 172), Tab. XII 3, 10, Fig. 11), which is an outstanding example of artistic craftsmanship [Tab. I, 2-1]. B. Kuftin, who discovered this pin, initially considered it a representation of a bull-drawn cart (Japaridze O, 1955, p. 88). The combination of bull depictions and cart representations in plastic art is a frequent occurrence in Near Eastern artifacts: such examples include a clay model from Tel-Fara and similar materials from the 6th century BCE (Child, 1956, p. 109). Models of carts are also known from various prehistoric sites in Central Asia (Mirtskhulava G. , 2010).

The stylized depiction of the bull, bull-horned thrones, and models of clay wheels, which imitate the two-wheeled cart used in agriculture and indicate its practical existence, are known from the archaeological sites of Amirani's Hill in Akhaltsikhe (Chubinishvili, 1965), figs. 9-6; 9-8), Khizanaantgori (Japaridze O. , 1992), Tab. XCII, XCIII), Kvasklebi settlement (Japaridze O. , 1992), Tab. C), Badaani settlement (Japaridze O. , 1992), Tab. LXVIII, LXIX), Tsikhiagora settlement (Makhadze, 2023), fig. 126), from the settlement of Khichivan's Qul-Tepe (Azerbaijan) (Chubinishvili, 1965, p. 91), Shresh-Bluris (Chubinishvili, 1965, p. 92), Mokhrabluris (K. Kushnareva, T. Chubinishvili,, 1970) (K. Kushnareva, T. Chubinishvili,, 1970), fig. 2522), Babadervish (Armenia), and other settlements (K. Kushnareva, T. Chubinishvili,, 1970, p. 282); (Munchayev, 1994, p. 45), Tab. 13).

It is noteworthy that the bull was used in the Caucasus not only as a cult animal or as a leading figure in agricultural activities but also as a driving force in carts from the very beginning of the Middle Bronze Age and throughout the subsequent period. This is well-supported by evidence from funerary sites, first with burial carts, and second, with the skulls and bones of sacrificed bulls. Important material related to bull burial rituals has been found at the earliest stages of the Middle Bronze Age, such as from the Bedenian culture burial sites, including the Qorgani of Bedenian Plateau (Orjonikidze, 2015), Tab. XL) and Ananuri №3 Great Qorgani, where two large burial carts were discovered in a rich Qorgani (Makharadze, Z., Kalandadze, N., Murvanidze B., 2016, p. 329),figs. 25,29, 33-36; Tab. XXIII-XXVII).

From the developed stage of the Middle Bronze Age, i.e., the second phase of the Trialaeti culture, burial wooden carts are also known. In 1958, a wooden four-wheeled burial cart was found in the Qorgani №5 at Sabid-Achcha in Trialaeti, which contained a rich inventory intended for the deceased's

afterlife (Japaridze O. , 1969, pp. 74-79), Tab. XXIV). Furthermore, the discovery of burial carts was confirmed by large-scale excavations in the 1930s in the region of Chalka. Academician B. Kuftin, who studied these monuments, emphasized that the ashes of the cremated deceased were brought into two-chamber Qorganis by a wooden burial cart, which he connects with the transport carts mentioned in Hittite cuneiform texts related to burial rituals (Kuftin, 1941, p. 81). He similarly interprets the heavy four-wheeled cart found in Sabid-Achcha №29 Qorgani (Kuftin, 1941, p. 81), Tab. CVII), which was driven by bulls. To support this idea, he points to the confirmed bones and skulls of two bulls on either side of the central axis of Chalka №15 Qorgani and the bones and skull of a bull found in №7 Qorgani, indicating that these animals were buried alongside the deceased and placed at the bottom of the grave with their skins removed. The researcher interprets this essential detail of the burial ritual as symbolizing that the bulls who brought the deceased to the grave would accompany them in the afterlife. Ultimately, the flesh of the sacrificed bulls was used for the banquet held in honor of the deceased, as indicated by the bull bones found in the huge copper cauldrons discovered in the center of the grave's pit.

B. Kuftin considers the tradition of sacrificing bulls in the Trialaeti culture as a direct parallel to the sacrifice of bulls (and also sheep) in the funerary rituals of the Hittite king and queen, as evidenced by Hittite cuneiform texts (Kuftin, 1941, p. 83). This period also includes the specific placement of bull skulls in burial sites like Ygranchai №5 Qorgani (Lower Kartli) and Threlis №43 burial site (Inner Kartli). A similar tradition is confirmed in Anatolia at the earlier Bronze Age royal burial site of Alaja Hoyuk [Tab. I, 3].

In addition to these artifacts, the wide, monumental paved roads revealed by a reconnaissance expedition in 1999 are of great importance. These roads were visible when the water level of the Chalka reservoir dropped significantly, revealing pathways leading to the monumental burial complexes excavated by B. Kuftin in the 1930s. This discovery and the reconstruction of the roads highlight that the burial carts intended for the elite society of Trialaeti were directed toward the Qorganis through these paved roads (Narimanishvili, 2009, pp. 6-7, 56-64), Tabs. V-XVII). Clearly, these grand roads were used by carts powered by bulls, which carried the deceased to the burial mounds for the ritual sacrifice. This indicates the significant role of bulls in the burial ritual.

Although zoomorphic-themed ornamental ceramic vessels are present throughout the entire Bronze Age, they are depicted with different themes, styles, and intensity (with the exception of the so-called early Qorgani culture), it should be emphasized that the face of the bull is not as common as other animals (Puturidze, 2022, pp. 7-22). Late Bronze Age ceramic vessels with depictions of bulls were found in the inventory of Threlis №24 burial (Akhvlediani N. , 1999, p. 46) Tab. CIV), which was particularly rich in presenting zoomorphic themes.

In eastern Georgia, the best example of a small plastic sculpture featuring a bull – an axe found in the village of Ozora – represents a typical case of the spread of Colchian axes in Inner Kartli, which became frequent from the early Bronze Age (Japaridze O, 2003, გვ. 232-233), Fig. 172). Numerous artifacts of clay plastics depicting bulls have also been found at various sites in southwestern Georgia. Clearly, the examples we have presented do not exhaust the cases of bull representations across several millennia of the Bronze Age, but we believe they provide a clear idea of the diversity and dynamic changes in how this animal was presented archaeologically in South Caucasus.

North Caucasus In the early Bronze Age, the well-known Maykop culture, spread in the North Caucasus, which is particularly rich in Toreutic materials, presents various compositions of bull representations on precious vessels and small plastic samples. This indicates that the bull cult held significant importance in the artifacts of this culture. Among the small plastic artifacts, the most remarkable and richest are the gold and silver round bull figures, which were intended as the heads of cult (თამარაშვილი, 1902) insignia – standards – and were discovered in kurgans (Markovin, V., Munchayev, R. , 2003, p. 54), Fig.10; (Piotrovsky, 2003, pp. 290-292). They are distinguished by their plasticity, exquisite craftsmanship, and the attention to every characteristic detail of the animal. The long and elegantly modeled horns, which emphasize the cultic role of the bull, are especially notable (Tab. V, 1). Besides

the round figures, bull representations also appear on two richly decorated silver vessels, made using the repoussé technique. One of these vessels is a cup entirely covered with landscapes, plant, and animal motifs, in which, among other animals, two bull figures are placed next to a horse and a lion along a central frieze. The second, a high-footed silver cup with geometric ornamental motifs, displays a more realistic bull figure among other animals on a wide frieze (Piotrovsky, 2003, p. 293), cat.no 192, Fig. 81, 82). Furthermore, another category of artifacts is also noteworthy. These are gold 19 bull figures found among flat plates depicting various animals, intended as decorative elements for a canopy or burial shroud in a rich Maykop kurgan (Markovin, V., Munchayev, R. , 2003, p. 55) (Piotrovsky, 2003, p. 294), cat.no 194 a-d). All these artifacts indicate that bull representations on various materials played an important role in the artistic craftsmanship of this culture in the North Caucasus. Other Maykop sites also confirm the presence of bull representations. Specifically, in the Kuban region, a bull figure was found in the exceptionally rich treasure of the Staromishastovskaya station, while in the dolmen of Novosvobodnaya, a small bull (or ox) sculpture was found made of stone and painted black (Markovin, V., Munchayev, R. , 2003, p. 65). All these cases, from small plastic sculptures to repoussé silver vessels, confirm the cultic significance of the bull in the rich Maykop culture.

Regarding the gold and silver bull figures intended as heads of standards in the Maykop culture, it is essential to mention the analogous artifacts found in central Anatolia, in the early Bronze Age, from the Hattian culture, discovered in the royal tomb at Alaca Höyük (Dictionary, British Museum Dictionary of the Ancient Near East 10), [Tab. II, 1]. Here, we also briefly address the viewpoint regarding the sudden emergence of a highly advanced, clearly foreign cultural element in North Caucasus, without any prior foundations or local precedent. This cultural innovation is seen to have infiltrated the North Caucasus from the centers of Anatolia. This viewpoint is currently widely accepted by researchers, and it is no longer subject to dispute (Andreeva, 1977) (Munchayev, 1994, pp. 209, 211, 212) (Markovin, V., Munchayev, R. , 2003, p. 78), (Rezepkin, 1991, pp. 171-172) (Masson, 1997, p. 65) based on multiple indisputable archaeological artifacts confirming this.

The Region of the Near East. In addition to the previously mentioned examples of bull artifacts discovered in both regions of the Caucasus, it is essential to highlight materials from various ancient cultures of the broad Near East. Among the most ancient is the monumentally significant and ancient sacred site of Göbekli Tepe in southeastern Anatolia, dating back to the X-VIII millennia BCE. This sacred site is situated on an artificial mound, or tell, built by hunter-gatherer societies on a limestone plateau. Its main feature is the T-shaped stone pillars, decorated with low and high reliefs of wild animals. Among the diverse faunal depictions, there is a bull relief, emphasizing its importance as a sacred animal (Schmidt, Göbekli Tepe – The Stone Age Sanctuaries. New Results of Ongoing Excavations With a Special Focus on Sculptures and High Reliefd. 239-256).

The Neolithic settlement of Çatalhöyük, located in the southern part of Asia Minor, prominently conveys the role of the bull as a sacred animal in the belief system of the Çatalhöyük people. The eastern wall of the main room of the settlement, designated as a sacred-ritual space, was entirely decorated with bull skulls, which were restored with plaster, and then their horns, eyes, and mouths were painted in dark red (Mellart, 1982, p. 93), Fig. 37). In the same settlement's Level VI, a rectangular plastered platform, adorned with seven bull horns, was excavated, clearly indicating that this was a ritual space (Sagona, A.,Zimansky, P., 2009, p. 93), Fig. 4.6-2) [Tab. I, 4]. Furthermore, on one of the painted walls of Çatalhöyük, a large red bull figure is depicted at the center, surrounded by smaller human figures (Sagona, A.,Zimansky, P., 2009, p. 91), Fig. 4.5) [Tab. I, 3]. All these findings point to the clear prominence of the bull cult in the belief system of the central Anatolian Neolithic society (Dictionary, British Museum Dictionary of the Ancient Near East 66-67); (Sagona, A.,Zimansky, P., 2009, pp. 86-92), Fig. 4.6; Fig. 4.5; (Mellart, 1982, pp. 92-93) Figs. 36 and 37).

From 2168-2050 BCE, the royal tombs of Ur in Sumer often feature the bull in various forms. Among the diverse materials discovered in the king's tomb, a gold bull figure was found, which adorned the

luxurious musical instrument, the lyre, on its ceremonial side (Woolley, Ur Excavations) (Black J., Green A., 1992, p. 44), [Tab. VI, 7]. Additionally, bulls clearly participated in the burial rituals, as evidenced by the paleo-zoological context of the tombs, where bull skulls and skeletal remains were found. As the excavator of the site, Leonard Woolley, notes and reconstructs the burial ritual, it appears that royal family members were interred in their tombs with the richest inventory, including the bull that was attached to a ceremonial chariot (Black J., Green A., 1992, p. 105), Fig. 84). Small gold bull figures are part of the royal tomb's luxurious burial inventory (Woolley, Ur Excavations), and they were also used as decorative attachments on the diadem of Queen Puabi (Crawford, 2004, pp. 168-169), Fig. 8.6).

Researchers emphasize that materials depicting the bull as a sacred animal are widely distributed in Asia Minor from the early Neolithic period through the period of Assyrian trading colonies and continue through the entire chronological retrospect (Aruz, 2008, p. 134). These artifacts persist even until the end of the late Bronze Age, which, in our opinion, clearly indicates the continuity of the sacred significance of the bull in the belief systems of the region. One of the best examples of the existence of the bull cult in this region is the gold and silver small bull artifacts discovered in the royal tombs of Alaca Höyük from the early Bronze Age, which served as cultic insignias – heads of standards [Tab. II, 1] (Dictionary, British Museum Dictionary of the Ancient Near East 10). Some of these artifacts have precise analogs, as noted above, in the royal tombs of Alaca. However, it should be noted that the repertoire of Hattian bronze standards features a much broader range of cultic artifacts represented by bulls (depictions of triads and others) (Lloyd, 1956, pp. 4,5), Fig. 5.28). Additionally, the importance of the bull in the burial rituals of the Hattian culture of the early Bronze Age is evident, as indicated by the inclusion of bull skulls and limbs in specific and prominent locations within the tombs, which was an essential characteristic of their tradition, further emphasizing the bull's exceptional role (Sagona, A., Zimansky, P., 2009, pp. 212-215), Fig. 5.30) [Tab. II, 3].

The following translation adheres to your instructions and uses „bull“ where appropriate: The artifacts related to bulls from the previously mentioned regions in the Caucasus, as well as other ancient cultures of the Near East, must also be highlighted. Among the oldest is the monumentally significant and ancient cultic site of Göbekli Tepe in southeastern Anatolia, dated to the 10th-8th millennium BC. This religious site is located on an artificial mound, built by a hunter-gatherer society on a limestone plateau. Its main characteristic is the T-shaped stone pillars, adorned with low and high reliefs of wild animals, including a bull, which highlights its importance as a cult animal (Schmidt, Göbekli Tepe – The Stone Age Sanctuaries. New Results of Ongoing Excavations With a Special Focus on Sculptures and High Reliefd. 239-256).

In the southern part of Asia Minor, the Neolithic settlement of Çatalhöyük emphasizes the role of the bull as a cult animal in its belief system. The eastern wall of the main living room in the settlement, which was designated as a cultic space, was entirely decorated with bull skulls, which were first restored with plaster and later painted with dark red to highlight the horns, eyes, and mouth (Mellart, 1982, p. 93), fig. 37). At the same settlement's Level VI, a rectangular platform was unearthed, adorned with bull horns, which was clearly a cultic place of worship (Sagona, A., Zimansky, P., 2009, p. 93), Fig. 4.6-2) [Tab. I, 4]. Furthermore, on one of the painted walls of Çatalhöyük, a large red bull figure stands surrounded by small human figures (Sagona, A., Zimansky, P., 2009, p. 91), Fig. 4.5) [Tab. I, 3]. This all clearly points to the prominent role of the bull cult in the belief system of central Anatolia during the Neolithic period (Dictionary, British Museum Dictionary of the Ancient Near East 66-67); (Sagona, A., Zimansky, P., 2009, pp. 86-92), Fig. 4.6; Fig. 4.5; 9, 10, 12, 13, 15 (Mellart, 1982, pp. 92-93), fig. 36 and 37).

The bull is frequently depicted in the royal tombs of Ur, in the capital of Sumer, dating to 2168-2050 BC. In the king's tomb, among various small figurines, a gold bull figure was found, which adorns the decorative side of one of the earliest musical instruments, the lyre (Woolley, Ur Excavations) (Black J., Green A., 1992, p. 44), [Tab. VI, 7]. Additionally, bulls are shown to have been involved in burial rituals, as evidenced by the paleozoological context of the tombs, where bull skulls and skeletal remains were found. As the excavator of the site, Leonard Woolley, notes and reconstructs the burial ritual, it appears

that the royal dead were buried with luxurious goods, including a chariot drawn by bulls (Black J., Green A., 1992, p. 105), Fig. 84). Gold bull figurines are part of the royal tomb's rich burial inventory (Woolley, Ur Excavations), and were also used as decorative elements on Queen Pu-abi's diadem (Crawford, 2004, pp. 168-169), Fig. 8.6).

Researchers emphasize that material depicting bulls as cult animals is widely spread across Asia Minor, starting from the earliest Neolithic period and continuing into the period of ancient Assyrian trade colonies, showing a continuous existence throughout the chronological retrospect of the region (Aruz, 2008, p. 134), extending even into the end of the late Bronze Age. This clearly reflects the continuous presence of the bull cult in the region's belief systems. One of the best examples of the existence of the bull cult in the region is the discovery of gold and silver small bull figurines found in the royal tombs of Alaca Höyük from the early Bronze Age, which served as cult insignia – the heads of standards [Tab. II, 1] (Dictionary, British Museum Dictionary of the Ancient Near East 10), some of which were found in the royal tumuli of Alaca. However, it should be noted that the repertoire of Hittite Bronze Age standards is much more diverse, with the depiction of bulls in various cultic artifacts (e.g., Triad representation and others) (Lloyd, 1956, pp. 4,5); (Sagona, A.,Zimansky, P., 2009, p. 207), Fig. 5.28). Furthermore, the bull's importance in the Hattian Bronze Age burial rituals is clearly highlighted by the placement of bull skulls and limbs in specific, prominent spots within tombs, which was a key feature of their burial tradition (Sagona, A.,Zimansky, P., 2009, pp. 212-215), Fig. 5.30) [Tab. II, 3].

This passage provides insight into the rich cultural and religious significance of the bull as a cult animal in various ancient Near Eastern societies, underscoring its continuous presence and importance throughout the Bronze Age.

The silver rython from the Hittite Empire (Central Anatolia) of the 14th-13th centuries BC is an outstanding and perfectly modeled artifact. In Hittite texts, this type of sculptural vessel is mentioned as *bibru*, from which a deity would receive sacrificial offerings. It is believed that this cup was dedicated to the storm god, the primary deity in the Hittite religious pantheon, associated with the bull (Müller-Karpe, 2008, p. 183), cat. no. 109) [Tab. IV,3]. The depiction of a bull with its front legs bent, which also serves as its front support, is ideal both stylistically and technically, and it rests on the neck of the rython, to which an ear is attached. This solution allows the metalworker to skillfully present the animal's posture, its cultic function, and the solid support design for the vessel.

Among the materials of the 3rd millennium BC, some notable examples include a bull statue made of a combination of copper alloy, wood, and bitumen, found at Tell El-'Ubaid, from the Ninhursag temple, dating to the early dynastic III B period (2400-2250 BC) (Collins, 2003, p. 85), Fig. 43) [Tab. III,6]. Additionally, a standing bull figure made of hammered copper and silver, with curved horns at the level of the forehead and irregular silver-inlaid features on the body, is regarded as one of the most outstanding artifacts of Mesopotamia in the 3rd millennium BC. This work not only showcases high technical skill in artistic metalworking but also reflects the artist's special talent in depicting the animal (Tab. IV,2). The figure's inlaid eyes are missing, which would have initially given it more expressiveness. The triangular carved sign on the bull's forehead is thought to indicate the animal's cultic „sacred“ nature, symbolizing strength and fertility, even more so than some deities (Evans, 2003, p. 441), cat. no. 314). This artifact clearly emphasizes the bull's role as a cult animal in the ancient Near East. Bull depictions, especially in metalwork, are so widespread in various ancient archaeological cultures that presenting them fully within the scope of this article is impossible. Therefore, here, we will touch upon only a few outstanding examples from the leading prehistoric cultures.

In addition to small-scale figurines from different regional monuments, the image of the bull also appears in the architectural reliefs of molded Aliz-Aguri decorations. Typically, it is executed in low relief against a contrasting-colored background in the form of a drinking cup. A prime example of the active representation of the bull as a cult animal in art is the decorated archway of the Ishtar Temple in Babylon (Marzahn, The Ishtar Gate 9, 10, 12, 13, 15). Today, thanks to the surviving Aliz-Aguri construction technique, this monumental architectural complex excellently reflects the cultic nature of the Ishtar

Temple. The colorful bull and dragon reliefs on its facade [Tab. VII, 1, 2, 3] clearly emphasize the priority of the bull as a cultic symbol.

Numerous archaeological artifacts depicting bulls have also been found in the Minoan-Mycenaean world. Notable among these is the fresco known as „The Bull and the Acrobat,“ dated to around 1600-1500 BC, found in the halls of the Knossos Palace. This fresco depicts an acrobat performing a difficult acrobatic pose on the back of a large bull, while one person holds the bull's horns, and another holds its hind legs. This event, likely a spectacle for the Minoan nobility during the Late Minoan II-III A period [Tab. VI,4], speaks to the strength and significance of the bull in Minoan culture (Kehnscherper, 1980: Color Illustration). The bull's head is also featured in another fresco from the Knossos Palace, dated to 1600 BC (Aegean Art., 1972), Tab. 45) [Tab. III,2]. Evidence of bull cult practices on Crete also includes the large stone bull's horn altar, known as the „Sacred Horns,“ found on the lower terrace of the Knossos Palace (Aegean Art., 1972), Tab. 48) [Tab. VI,6]. Additionally, in Aegean materials, the bull is depicted in the form of ritual vessels. One example is a rython from the island of Psiri, dated to the middle of the 2nd millennium BC, which features a finely modeled full figure of a bull (Aegean Art, 1972: 12) [Tab. III,3], while another is a cult vessel made of gold and silver from the Shaft Grave №4 in Mycenae, which includes a realistic and highly refined depiction of a bull's head with large gold horns and a so-called double axe detail between them, as well as a large gold rosette application on the bull's forehead [Tab. VI,5]. All of this highlights the cultic importance of the bull (Kehnscherper, 1980), Color Illustration).

Another rare style example is a rython-type clay vessel depicting a chariot with three bulls [Tab. III,4]. This unique artifact was discovered at the Carpi settlement (Greece) from the Sub-Mycenaean period (after 1100 BC) (Aegean Art., 1972), Tab. 104). Also notable is a bronze figure made between 1700-1450 BC, known as „The Bull and the Acrobat.“ This is a highly dynamic example of Minoan art, depicting a bull in a jumping pose with an acrobat stretched across its back, attempting to land with both feet on its body [Tab. IV,5] (Aruz, 2008, p. 135) cat. no. 74). This particularly expressive bronze figure can be paralleled with the fresco from Knossos, where a composition of bull and human figures is shown, further emphasizing the bull's central role in Aegean religious activities. One of the outstanding examples from the Aegean world is the gold cups from Vaphio, dated to the 15th century BC. The relief scenes on these cups prominently feature bulls in various compositions [Tab. VI,2; VI,3] (Aegean Art., 1972), Tab. 139-140). These reliefs also hint at the religious significance of the bull in Minoan culture.

Most of the representations of the bull that we present, whose cult and ritual functions are beyond doubt, indicate their diverse stylistic characteristics of depiction, while at the same time conveying different materials and forms, which were characteristic of monuments from various regions of the Caucasus, Near East, and Aegean civilization during various chronological periods of the prehistoric era, from the Neolithic period to the first millennium BC.

The cult of the bull is a peculiar reflection in the research mentioned above, including myths (“The Bull Living in the Lake“), epic (“Gilgamesh“), legends and tales (“Fairy Tale of the Bull of the Lake and the Huge Bull“), written literary monuments (“Stephane Mtbevari,“ „Basili Zarzmeli“), ethnopractice (“Herding“), toponyms (“Sakharia,“ „Okhjiri,“ „Khartakhevi“), and material culture (with factual archaeological material in the form of tables).

It should be noted that the archaeological specimens related to the bull, known from different regions of the ancient world, are not exhausted by the material provided above. We have only touched on certain, albeit significant, materials from various regions of the Ancient East, the Caucasus, and the Minoan-Mycenaean civilization, which, we believe, convey the importance of the bull as a cult animal and a prominent force in faunal symbolism quite diversely. The confirmation of these animal representations through artistic bronze, ceramics, small sculptures made of precious metals, fresco painting, and architectural monuments clearly emphasizes its importance in the worldview and thinking of the ancient world. Therefore, the visualization of the bull based on material culture monuments is undeniable evidence of its prominent role in the civilizational development of various important regions of the ancient world.

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N.Akhvlediani, M.Puturidze 2020 Motivation of naming of the plants in formation of the ancient toponyms and their archaeological context (CCS&ES), American Journal of Science, Cross-Cultural Studies USA, Cauman, Vol.5 Issue.3 September DOI: 10.24411/2470// N. Akhvlediani, M.Puturidze, Mcenaris Sakheldebis Motivacia Uzvelesi Toponimebis FormirebaSi, samecniero amerikuli jurnal, kros kulturuli kvelvebi, ashsh, kaumani.

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Discription of Tables:

Tab.I

1. Model of two wheeled chariot and its details from the Badaani settlement
2. Bronze pins expressing the wheels and horns of the bull
 - 2.1– From Nachekezevi, Savjkhore; 2.2,6 – From Sachkhore Middle Bronze Age burials;
 - 2.3-From Luristan, Iran; 2.4 – From B layer of Kvatskhela settlement, Urbnisi;
3. 2.5,8 – From north Caucasus; 2.7 – From Sachkhore
4. Painted wall expressing the bull from one of the room of Neolithic Age Çatal Höyük (Anatolia) Settlement
5. Horns of seven bulls set on clay platform of Neolithic Age VI layer settlement of Çatal Höyük (Anatolia)

Tab.II

1. The head of standard representing a gold-plated silver figurine of bull
2. Figurine of limestone recumbent calf from Early Bronze Age Ebla settlement (Tell Madrich), Syria
3. Burial tradition with bull's skulls: from rich burials of Alaça Höyük (Anatolia), Irganchay №5 kurgan and Treli №43 burial (Georgia)
4. Figurine of bull model inside the clay vessel and standing at the door. From Middle Bronze Age sanctuary from Ashkelon, Israel.
5. Group of bulls represented on a late Uruk period cylinder seal with a ritual construction in middle

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1. Clay rhyton of bull of the 1950-1836 cc BC from Kül-Tepe – Karum Kane II (Assur trade colony in Anatolia)
2. Impression of bull's head of the 1600 c. BC from Knossos (Krete)
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4. Clay vessel-rhyton, expressing the chariot with three bulls from Karpi settlement (Greece), sub-Mycenaean period, after 1100 c. BC
5. Plumbic handled weight of a shape of standing bull's figurine from western Central Asia, late III-early II millennium BC

6. Standing figurine of a bull, modeled by copper, wood and bitumen from the Ninhursanga Temple, Tell El-Ubeid (Mesopotamia) of the Early Dynastic III B period, 2400-2250 BC

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1. Head of bull, modeled by copper and bone from Mesopotamia of the Early Dynastic III period, 2550-2250 cc. BC
2. Bull's incrusted figurine, modeled by arsenic copper and silver from Mesopotamia, end of the III millennium BC
3. Silver rhyton of bull of the Hittite culture from Anatolia, 14-13 cc.BC
4. Silver figurine of kneeling bull holding the vessel. Proto-Elamite period, 3000-2800 cc. BC, probably, located to east region from city Uruk (Mesopotamia)
5. Bronze figurine of bull and acrobat of the middle-Minoan period, 1700-1550 cc. BC

Tab. V

1. Silver and gold standard's heads from Maykop great kurgan (North Caucasus)
2. Red engobe rhyton of bull of the Old Hittite period from Tokat (Anatolia)
3. The cultic-ritual vase of Old Hittite period, ornamented with painted low-reliefs with the standing on the altar bull expressed on a 4 th frieze
4. An ellipsoid shape one handled spouted vessel with the bull's head on a mouth of the Hittite culture from Inandiktepe (Anatolia)
5. The cultic-ritual vase with bull's low-relief of the Old Hittite period from Hüseyindede (Anatolia)
6. The red engobe rhytons expressing the bull of the Old Hittite period from Inandiktepe (Anatolia)

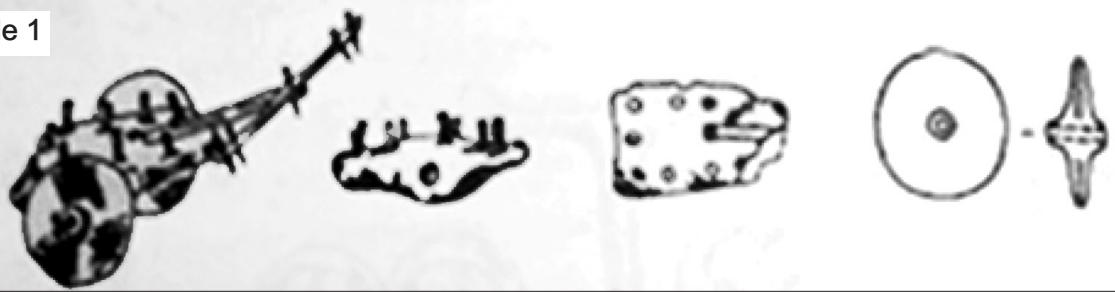
Tab. VI

1. Late Minoan I period (1625-1450 cc. BC) ornamented figurine of bull's head with the golden high horns from Crete. Zakros, palace.
2. One handled gold vase of Vapio ornamented with bull's low-reliefs. XV century BC
3. The detail of Vapio vase ornamented with low-relief standing two bulls in Heraldic position
4. Fresco, expressing the bull and acrobat of Late-Minoan II-III A period from Knossos palace (Crete)
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6. The stone altar. A cultic statue of the bull's horns from Knossos palace (Crete)
7. Incrusted facade panel of golden bull's head of the Early Dynastic III A period (2550-2400 cc. BC) „great Lyre“ from king's burial of Ur modeled by gold, silver, lapis-lazuli, shell, bitumen and wood

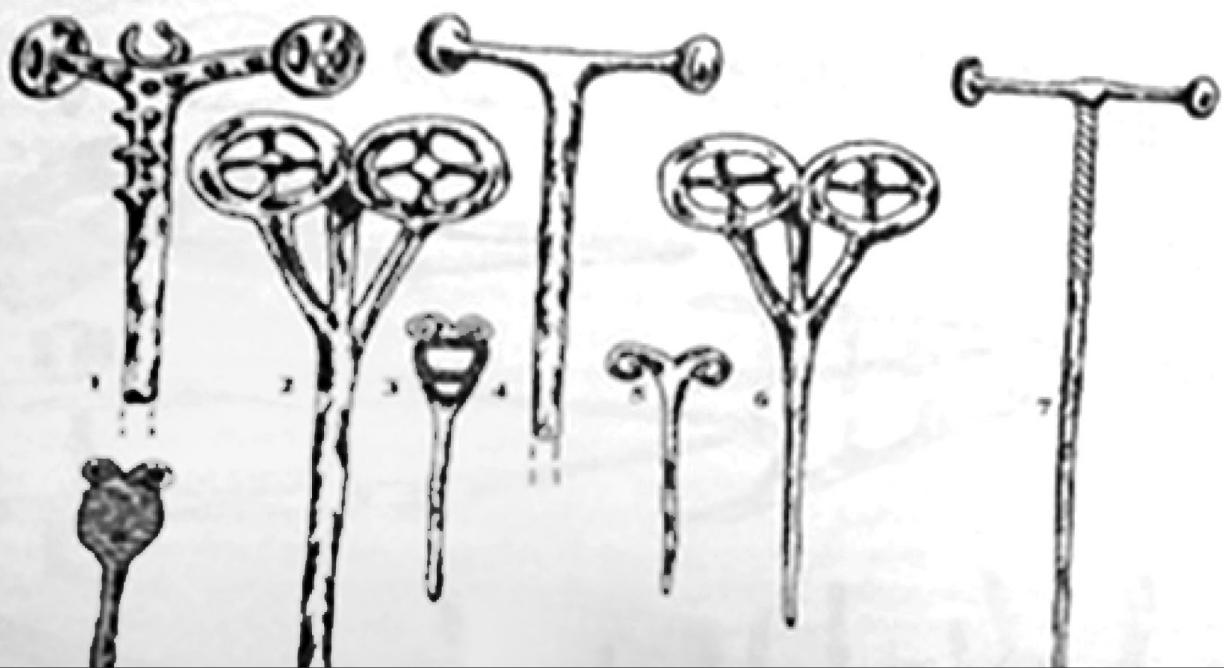
Tab. VII

1. General view of the Ishtar Gate (Babylon) exposed in Near Eastern department of the Pergamon Museum
2. The low-reliefs of bull and dragon expressed on a facade of the Ishtar Temple (Babylon). Stage of the first building
3. The low-relief of bulls covered with the flat glazed technique from the Ishrar Temple facade (Babylon), stage of the second building

Table 1



1



2



3



4

Table 2



2



1



3



4



5



Table 3



Table 4

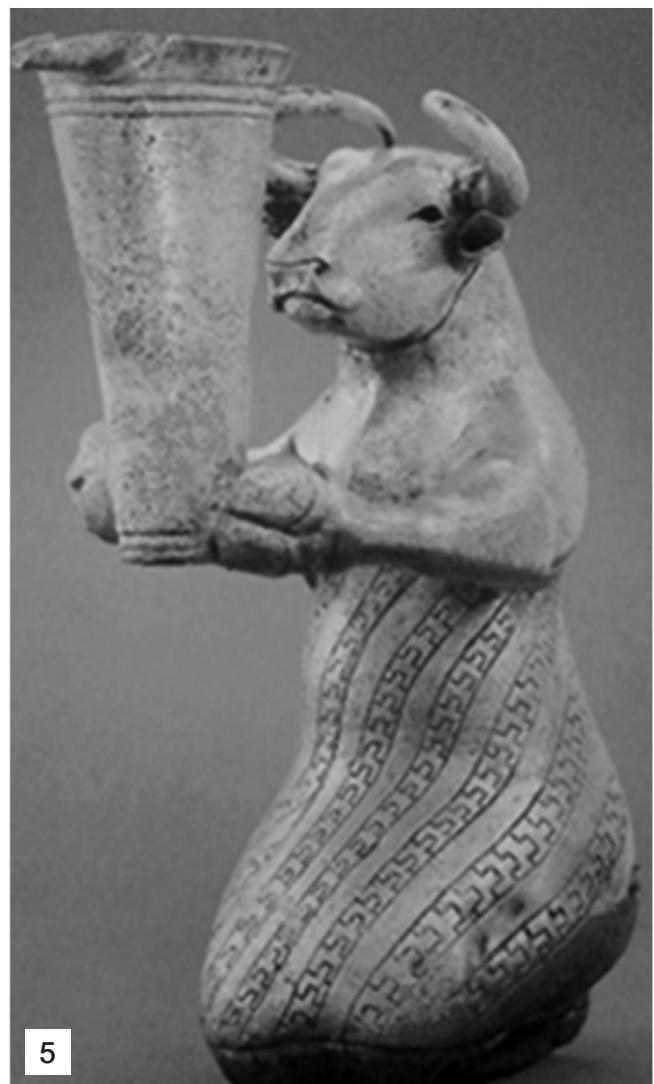


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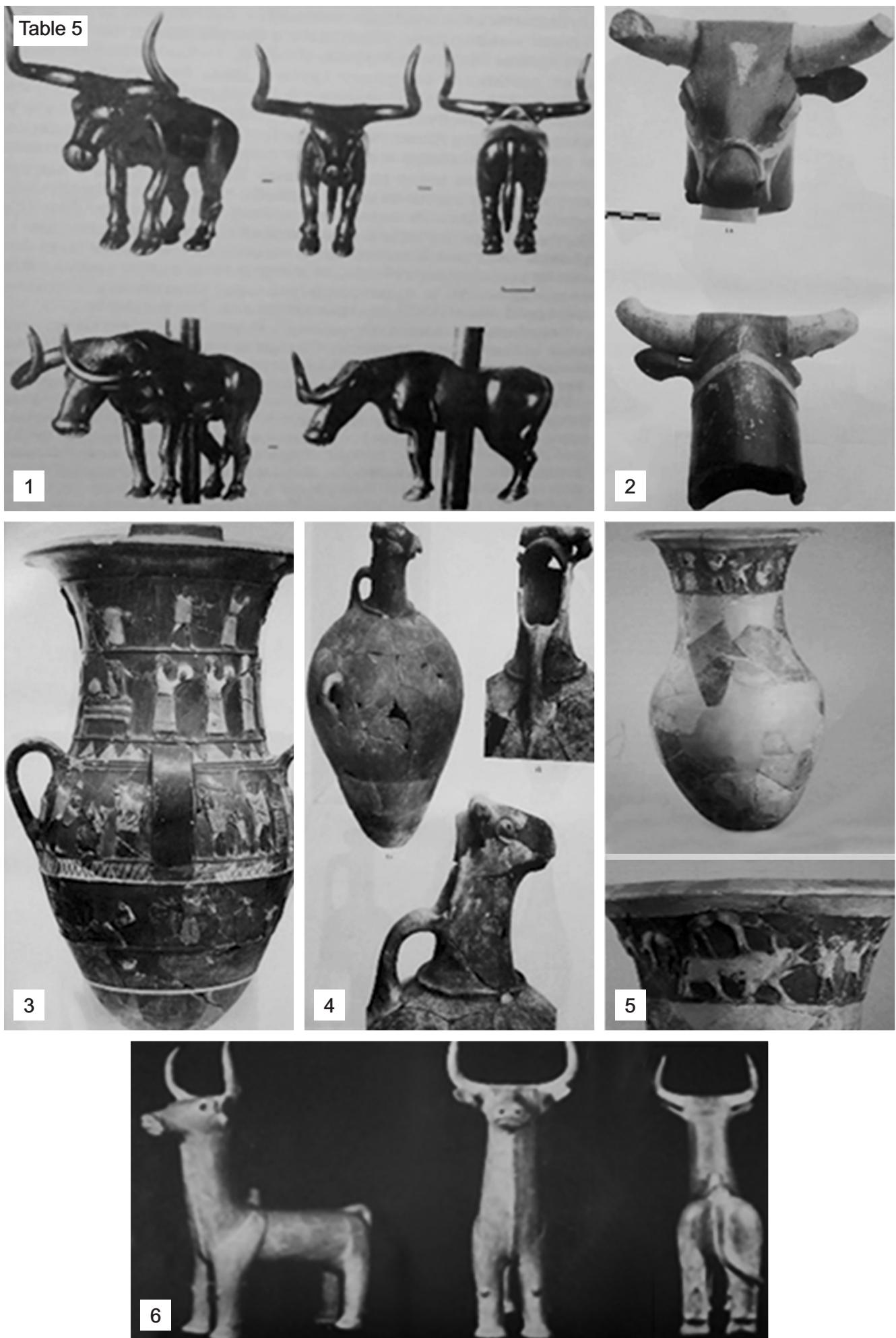


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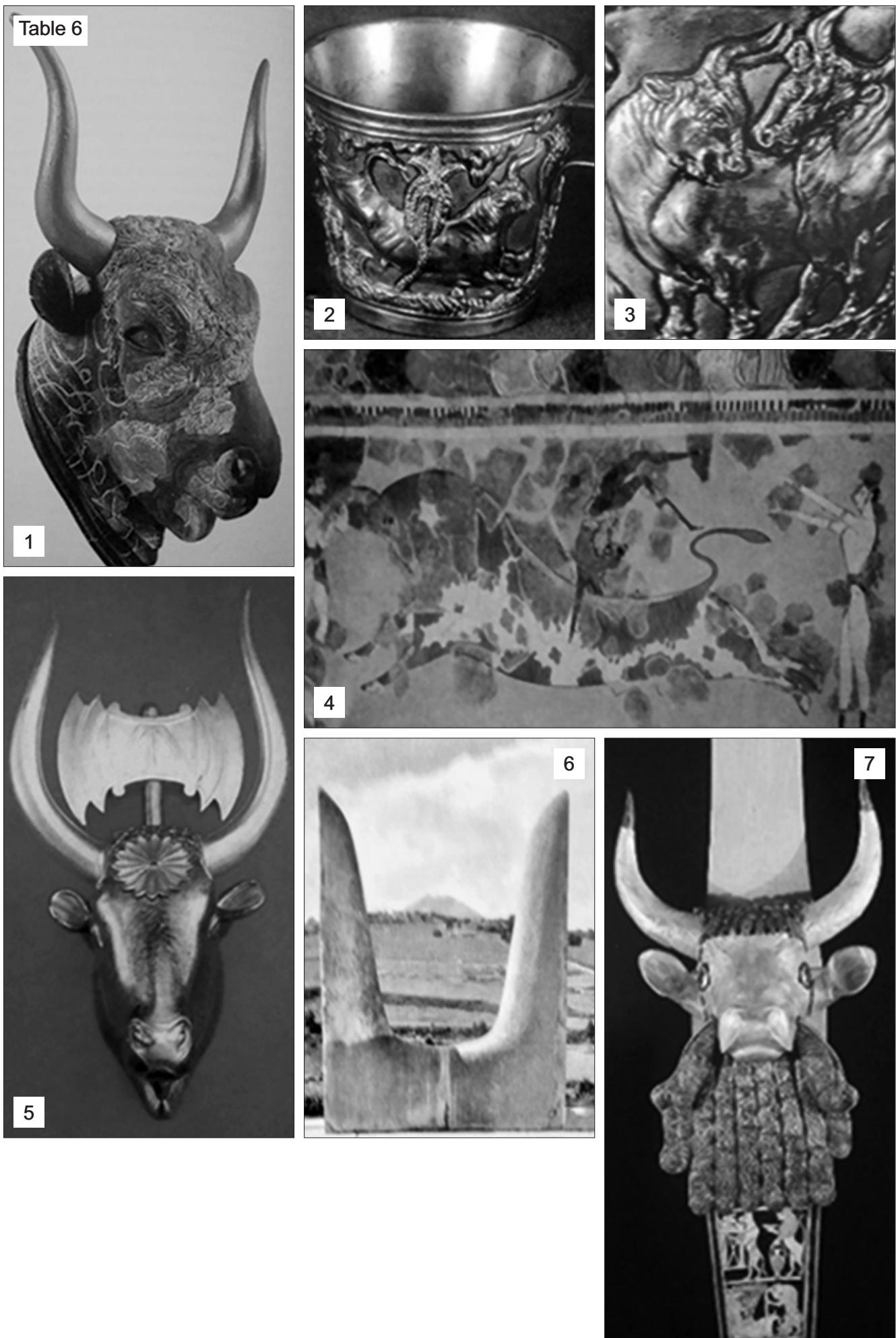


Table 7

