

ARAM

ZOROASTRIANISM IN THE LEVANT AND THE AMORITES



ARAM PUBLISHING OXFORD UK

VOLUME 26, 1 & 2

2014

EQUID BURIALS IN ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONTEXTS IN THE AMORITE, HURRIAN AND HYKSOS CULTURAL INTERCOURSE

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WHY EQUID BURIALS?

In their recent article entitled "Being an 'Ass'" H.J. Greenfield *et al.* (2012) state that burials of domestic donkeys widely occur in the funerary contexts in the Near East during the Early Bronze Age, i.e., the 3rd millennium BC, but there is not much understanding of the character and significance of such interments. According to the authors, donkeys in the burials of the Early Bronze Age have been interpreted as adored domestic animals or sick animals but in the Middle Bronze Age contexts their ritual significance has been understood more clearly. In the analysis of the archaeological finds from Tell es-Safi/Gath in Israel the authors came to the conclusion that a domestic ass had been deliberately tied and slaughtered as the foundation deposit of a building dating from the Early Bronze Age III (EBIII) period.

This paper tries to explore how the intentional burials of the *equus* genus species, such as domesticated horse (*equus caballus*), ass/donkey (*equus asinus*) and onager (*equus hemionus*) and their hybrids, are associated with the intercourse of the Amorite, Hurrian and Hyksos cultural spheres in the Ancient Near East during the Early and Middle Bronze Age (ca. 3300–1600/1500 BC). This may elucidate the origins of the practice which has for long intrigued archaeologists. Contemporary textual evidence, like Greenfield *et al.* (2012) note, is of value in interpreting the intentional burials and the significance of a donkey for people of the Bronze Age in the Near East.

Beside the studies by Greenfield *et al.* (2012), in recent years various researches have cast more light on the ritual and symbolic uses of donkeys that will be further discussed here. A survey of the ass burials in the Near East and discussion of their significance have, for example, been conducted by F. Marshall (2007), S. Rossel *et al.* (2008) and K.C. Way (2010). C. Grigson (2012a, 2012b) has also recently touched the subject while reviewing the domestication process of equids. G. Bar-Oz, *et al.* (2013) have further elucidated the ritual burial of donkeys with special Bronze Age finds coming from Tel Haror in Israel.

Why have I raised the question of the cultural intercourse of the Amorites, Hurrians and Hyksos in the case of the known equid burials from the Bronze Age Near East? In my view it is worth looking at the phenomenon and where it might have its roots. We may archaeologically trace the rise of equid burials in Syria-Palestine (comprising modern Syria, Israel, the Palestinian territories and Jordan). If we can trace the track of influences, we may ask what the role of the co-existence of the mentioned people or relationship with each other had in the course of the adaptation of such practices.

INTERCOURSE OF THE AMORITES, HURRIANS AND HYKSOS

There is evidence concerning the existence of Amorites already ca. 26th–24th centuries BC in the Sumerian (VAT 127 29 in Deimel 1924) and Eblaitic sources (Archi 1985). But the conquests of Naram-Sin from Akkad (RIME 2, 1993: 90-94) locate the people more specifically. Amorites were Semites, especially Western Semites. Their language is only known from names of people, deities and toponyms. (Gelb 1961, Streck 2000). Hurrians were non-Semitic and non-Indo-European people (Salvini 1998: 99). Interestingly, the Amorites and Hurrians start appearing in the textual history of Syria rather coterminously in the Early Bronze Age, i.e., the 3rd millennium BC (cf. Salvini 1998: 99).

Geographically the distribution of the Amorites focuses on the West in the desert-steppe region of Syria including Jebel Bishri and the Middle Euphrates during the 3rd millennium BC, but their existence was even extending to the sphere of the Mediterranean coast at that time (Lönnqvist 2008, cf. Charpin and Ziegler 2003: 29). In the Ur III period Amorites approached Southern Mesopotamia *en*

masse threatening the walls of Ur (Wilcke 1969/1970: 9–12). I.M. Diakonoff points out that the influence of the Hurro-Urartian people may have been much larger than earlier thought. Their dwelling area reached from Central Transcaucasia to Northern Mesopotamia. The Kura-Araxes culture region has been seen largely overlapping with the distribution of the Hurro-Urartian language group. (Diakonoff 1984: 8). However, some see that no original home region of the Hurrians can be traced for (Hoffner 1998: 168).

The Upper Habur river seems to have been an early contact zone that has left clear evidence of co-existing societies consisting of both Amorite and Hurrian inhabitants at the sites, such as Chagar Bazar (Gadd 1937, 1940) and Nagar, the latter identified with Tell Brak (Oates–Oates 1993), in the Middle Bronze Age. So, there is clear historical evidence of the co-existence and contact between these people, who were not relatives in a linguistic sense. This phenomenon of co-existence spreads towards West and South during the Middle Bronze Age reaching the Mediterranean coast as far as Tell Atchana/Alalakh. At Alalakh the rulers of the Level VII bore Amorite names, but there is evidence that the Hurrian names are predominating in the name lists of the inhabitants (Wiseman 1953: 3–10). From the genetic point of view the question is more complicated, depending on intermarriages and their commonality.

Cuneiform sources found in Israel in recent decades support that people bearing Amorite and Hurrian names also existed in the country during the Old Babylonian period, and even some sites such as Hazor in the North may have belonged to *Amurru*, the land of the Amorites, as indicated in a letter (A. 2760) sent by Shamshi-Adad, king of Assyria (see Malamat 1970: 165–166). Close diplomatic and trade contacts were maintained between Hazor and Mari in the MBII period. (See, e.g., Horowitz and Shaffer 1992a, b). Excavations at Hebron have yielded material typical of the MBII Hyksos period (Hammond 1963–1966: 50–51), and a fragment of a cuneiform tablet (Reg. No. H. 86-I) recovered there contains both Amorite and Hurrian names, the Amorites being in majority. (Anbar and Na'aman 1986, see also Oren 1997: 263).

But who were the Hyksos then? Their ethnicity or identity has been long disputed. They are people, who initially were identified by their intrusive occupation of the Delta region in Egypt ca. 1674 BC and have been seen as being responsible for the collapse of the traditional Pharaonic state, i.e., the arrival of the Second Intermediate period to Egypt. The Turin Royal Canon (Gardiner 1959) from the time of Ramesses II (1279–1213 BC) and ancient historian Manetho's text, originally from the 3rd century BC preserved by the historian Josephus, elucidate the origins of the Hyksos beside the archaeological evidence from Egypt and Syria-Palestine. Especially the site of Tell el-Dab'a identified with Avaris, the capital of Hyksos, in the Delta region in Egypt has provided material evidence of the culture of these foreign rulers. (Bietak 1991).

In addition, Tell el-Yehudieh (Petrie 1906), Tell Makshuta (Holladay 1997) and Inshas (van den Brink 1982) with some other sites in the Delta region comprise strata occupied by Hyksos in Egypt. Many features in the names of these foreign rulers point to the West Semitic origins (Redford 1992: 100), but according to E.A. Speiser (1933: 36–51), in the Hyksos names there also are some elements from the Hurrian language. The geographic origin of the Hyksos has equally been disputed: some say they came from the littoral Palestine and Syria, others point to more central Syria. Earlier M. Bietak, the excavator of Tell el-Dab'a, thought that the Hyksos were Canaanites by origin but later he also has found common elements especially between the Hyksos and the Amorites, although some Hurrian impact cannot be ruled out either (Bietak 1997: 113). Finally there is historical evidence of the Hyksos' expulsion from Egypt (see ANET, 233–234) and the restoration of the Pharaonic state.

SOME PREHISTORIC EVIDENCE OF THE *EQUUS* SPECIES

Horse, although not the domesticated one, became important for people already in the Palaeolithic Age. There are engravings representing horses which have been dated to the Middle Palaeolithic period in the Transcaucasian area (Chalaigner 1995: 211). The Upper Palaeolithic period (ca. 30,000 years ago) provides images of horses exemplified in beautiful cave paintings of the Franco-Cantabrian areas of Southern France and Spain. Apart from engravings and paintings horses appear in portable art as well. In the overall analyses of the animal images of the Palaeolithic art horses are common subjects like bisons. (See, e.g., Plassard 1999). A. Leroi-Gourhan (1976) interpreted that they had a special

symbolic meaning in the female-male-dichotomy. One may assume some ritual meanings, even totemic ideas, applied to the horse among those early people, who were hunters. In cave paintings hunters seem to have expressed a need to harness the animals into their power.

In the Near East onagers, wild asses/donkeys and gazelles were hunted animals in the Syrian steppe and the Middle Euphrates sphere from the Palaeolithic period onwards. The skeleton of a wild ass, *equus africanus*, comprising a Levallois point as the evidence of the hunting of asses in the Middle Palaeolithic period (50,000 years ago) has been recovered in the oasis area of El Kowm beneath the mountain of Jebel Bishri in Central Syria (Boëda *et al.* 1999). Interestingly, the Bible mentions that wild female asses are easy to catch during the mating period (Jer. 2: 24), because they scream and can be easily located and thus caught. Both gazelles and onagers are typically met in steppic areas, and onagers can live in dry environments and relatively high temperatures sustaining a few days without water. They live on juicy herbaceous plants, similar to gazelle habitats. (Cavallo 2000: 76).

Like at El Kowm in the bend of the Euphrates at Mureybet and in the first phase of Abu Hureyra nearby, the onager was hunted beside the gazelle. A.J. Legge and P.A. Rowley-Conwy (2000: 426–425, 435–455) also discuss the special methods of hunting onagers and gazelles at Abu Hureyra the latter continuing to have served as the major goal of hunting. The prehistoric finds from the Euphrates bend represent a smaller variant of the onagers than the more southern Mesopotamian ones from Umm Dabaghiyah, a site dating to the 7th millennium BC between the Euphrates and the Tigris in modern Iraq. The Neolithic people of Umm Dabaghiyah even painted figures of onagers on house walls. (Kirkbride 1982, Bökönyi 1986).

THE DOMESTICATION OF EQUIDS

The domestication of the horse is a controversial issue. The cult of the horse clearly took place before its domestication (Ivanov 1998: 146). The Eurasian steppe has generally been seen as the home of the domesticated horse, but the time-scale is varying in various studies. The steppic sphere of the Volga river, Western Siberia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan are areas in which the horse hunting, sacrifice and cult and even domestication have been traced for and dated to the Chalcolithic period. The Cucuteni–Tripolye culture (4800–3000 BC) has been seen as a crucial actor in the horse domestication. Its origin is traced to the Moldavian forest-steppe area whence the culture spread to the North and to the East reaching the valley of the Dniepr. The Sredni Stog culture of the Kurgan cultures in the steppe area of the Dniepr valley in the Dniepr–Donets region of the Pontic-Caspian area is thought to be one of the key players in the domestication process. (Anthony 1991: 257–263). The culture has been dated to 4500–3500 BC, and it has been seen as having been ancestral to the Indo-Europeans. There is evidence of early rituals associated with horse burials from the Sredni Stog site of Dereivka demonstrated with a buried skull of a horse with a hide and a bit wear, and another Sredni Stog site has provided a sacrificed horse in the Volga region and in later sites of the Yamna culture (3600–2200 BC) into which the Cucuteni–Tripolye culture assimilated. (Kohl 2008: 51, Ivanov 1998, Anthony 1991: 263, see also Mallory 1989). Theories of the pastoralist migration from the western part of the steppic area of Eurasia including horse riding and wagons have been prevalent. (Frachetti 2012: 3). By the 4th millennium BC the domesticated horse (*equus caballus*) apparently had reached the Caucasian and Caspian area and the dwelling areas of the Indo-Europeans. P.L. Kohl states that, if the horse was domesticated in Ukraine already in the 5th millennium BC and Kazakhstan in the 4th millennium BC, no effects were visible in the Near East, yet (Kohl 2008: 140). However, nowadays the domesticated horse in Mesopotamia is also dated to the 4th millennium BC (Grigson 2012a: 90).

Uncertain evidence of domesticated donkeys that dates even to c. 7th millennium BC (c. 6684–6475 cal BC) comes from Yemen in the Arabian Peninsula (Marshall 2007: 388). It is generally argued that wild ass (*equus africanus*) emerged in the fauna of North Africa and the Sahara from where it as an animal of arid regions probably spread to Egypt (Clutton-Brock 2012: 57). Some see that the wild ass was indigenous to Western Asia as well. For example, P. Ducos (1986) has suggested that there was a native element in Western Asia, and C. Grigson (2012b) has also recently discussed the possibilities of the native Asian variant. As previously mentioned, the ass from Syria found with the Levallois point dated to the Middle Palaeolithic period was reported to represent *equus africanus* (see Boëda *et al.* 1999). In Egypt the site of El-Omari provides evidence of domesticated donkeys (*equus asinus*) dated

to the 5th millennium BC (Marshall 2007: 385), and from Badari from ca. 4000 BC (Burleigh 1986: 234). Ma'adi in the Delta area as well as Hierakonpolis, Buto and Elephantine in Egypt provide evidence from the 4th millennium BC (Marshall 2007: 385). The Ma'adi culture in Egypt had a close connection to the Early Bronze Age I (EBI) Palestine through a trade route. (Kantor 1992: 12–13, Marshall 2007: 384). A laden donkey figurine (see Fig. 1.) has been discovered from 'Azor in Israel and dates to the EBI period (Amiran 1985: 191). As noted, whether the first domesticated Levantine donkeys are descendants of the mentioned African ancestors or other species has been discussed in recent years. The 4th millennium BC seems to be the period of the appearance of the domesticated donkey in the Levant. This probably took place through the Ma'adi culture.

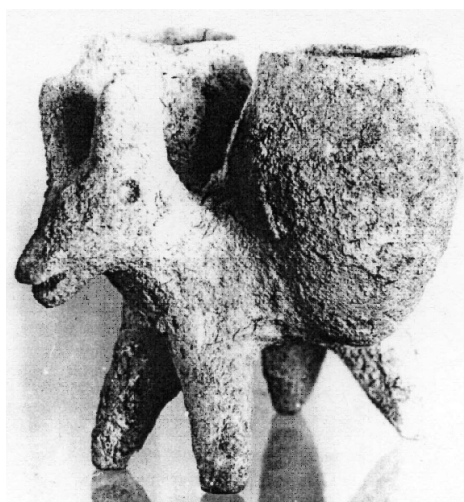


Fig 1. A clay figurine of a laden donkey from 'Azor, Israel.
Photo courtesy: Israel Antiquities Authority.

The donkey was the most common pack-animal during the Early Bronze Age in Egypt, the Levant and Mesopotamia, not the horse or the camel. Domesticated donkeys were chiefly used in ploughing and in a long-distance trade but not so much for warfare like horses (Marshall 2007: 389). According to the Mari documents (ARM) from Syria, donkeys were also used for rearing the flocks of sheep and goats like today in the area (Fig. 2.) and were obviously used as draft animals as well. They were clearly appreciated, and therefore they apparently were used as sacrificial animals valuable enough for gods. The illustrations of equids, such as donkeys, donkey-onager hybrids, mules and horses, harnessed and used for wheeled transport, become common in the mid-3rd millennium BC material of greater Mesopotamia (Kohl 2008: 142). The royal standard of Ur inlaid in shell and lapis lazuli, now in the collection of the British Museum (WA 121201: 1928-10-10, 3) and discovered from the royal cemetery of Ur, depicts onagers, donkeys or, even *kunga*, donkey-onager hybrids, according to some, walking in a procession in a ceremonial way. (See also Clutton-Brock 2012: 28-32; see also Weber 2008).

M. Bietak (2011: 33) holds that the domesticated horse and light chariots were introduced to Egypt as late as by the Hyksos in the MBII period of the 2nd millennium BC. He argues that the earliest domesticated horse bones in Egypt come from Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris. According to Bietak, the famous Buhen horse burial found in the Nubia frontier and dated to 1675 BC (see Burleigh 1986: 232) would not be from the Middle Kingdom period, as earlier thought, but from the period of the New Kingdom.

HURRIANS WITH HORSES AND THE HORSES OF *AMURRU*

In the early Hurrian culture horses already appear in palace economy in the second half or the 3rd millennium BC, and numerous clay figurines representing horses have been recovered at Tell Mozan identified with the Hurrian site of Urkesh. The distribution of the horse from Transcaucasia is dated to that period. (Ivanov 1998: 145–147). It seems that the horse was adopted from the North. In the early ritual and cult of horses Hurrians seemed to have played an important



Fig. 2. Shepherds rearing a flock of sheep with a donkey and dogs beneath Jebel Bishri in the Euphrates valley in Syria.
Photo: Minna Lönnqvist 2006.

role. We may inquire whether the twilight of the Hurrian culture and its use of equid burials had an impact on the ritual world of the Levant as well. The Indo-European Hittite culture with its war chariots was also connected with Hurrians and their horse-breeding (Hoffner 1998).

The texts from Chagar Bazar, the site already mentioned as providing evidence of mixed population of Amorites and Hurrians, refer to the training of horses. Mari texts (ARM) from the period of the Amorite occupation also knew the horse, and it was ridden, for example, by the Hanean tribe. Amorite stablemen and grooms are mentioned providing evidence that the western country was involved in supplying horses as well. (Lewy 1961: 74–75). The Amorite king of Qatna provided horses to Mari, and Qatna was famous of its white horses (Joannés 1997: 405, footnote a). Interestingly, the Alalakh texts which mention the horses of *Amurru* associate the horses in this connection with the Amorites and their lands. As previously mentioned, Alalakh at the time was populated both by the Amorites and Hurrians, the former ruling the site. All these texts date to the Middle Bronze Age, i.e., the 2nd millennium BC. (Gelb 1961: 41).

Tell Beydar, ancient Nabada, represents a site in the Habur area with a central interest in equid cults as revealed in the texts found at the site. Several species of *anshe*, namely donkey, are mentioned. Tell Beydar/Nabada was sometime under the power of Nagar, namely Tell Brak. The cities flourished in the time of Ebla that also appreciated equids in the 3rd millennium BC. The site of Nabada was located in an area favourable for equid breeding, and it was also in a convenient location for caravan trade. (Lebeau 2006: 16). At Nabada texts also mention professional cartwrights and a number of chariots as well as wagons. The attention paid to taking care of travellers is expressed in texts when the rations for both people and animals are recorded. 11 teams of 44 onagers had to be taken care of at one time, which was a great expense to the city in using fodder. (Bretschneider 2005: 57).

THE EARLIEST BURIALS OF EQUIDS IN THE NEAR EAST

A *tumulus* grave SMQ 49 containing human remains, grave goods and an equid (Phase 3) has been recently found from As-Sabiya in Kuwait on the Arabian Peninsula. According to the author, the burial customs and associated grave offerings allow the dating of the tomb to the Late Neolithic–Al-Ubaid period, which would mean the date as early as the 6th–5th millennium BC. The neighbouring site has a strong Ubaid presence, and imports from Mesopotamia are abundant. If the dating is correct, as it seems with particular stone weapons and bone tools, this equid burial would be the oldest ritual burial of an equid known so far from the Near East. The equid was tentatively identified as an onager belonging to undomesticated *equidae*. (Makowski 2013). This earliest equid burial seems to be connected with Mesopotamia through the Al-Ubaid culture, the predecessor of the Sumerian Uruk culture.

In the Mesopotamian finds chariot burials including equids have been found in Kish, Ur and Abu Salabikh from Early Bronze Age contexts. In Kish, Chariot Burial II contained four-wheeled chariots and four equids buried on top of them. The connection of the equids with the chariots has been disputed in the case. It is apparent that there was another chariot burial with three two-wheeled chariots that contained equids as well as Chariot Burial III. In Chariot Burial II, a mixed combination of equids, including horses (*equus caballus*) and asses (*equus asinus* and *equus hemionus*) were identified. Interestingly, the tombs are vaulted brick tombs which date from the Sumerian Early Dynastic period of the Early Bronze Age (Zarins 1986: 169–171). Abu Salabikh, an ancient Sumerian and Semitic site, also provides equid burials associated with humans dating to the Early Dynastic period. More evidence of equid burials including asses that are associated with humans have come from the Hamrin Basin in Mesopotamia (Zarins 1986: 171–175). The chariots discovered from the Sumerian Royal graves of Ur (dated to the Early Dynastic period) were either drawn by oxen or asses (Woolley 1946: 20). Clearer evidence of equids in Sumerian Ur come from the Ur III period graves, like from the grave of Šulgi and Amarsin dating from ca. 2100 BC. Animals were also sacrificed at the entrance to a tomb PG 1054 in Ur. (Woolley 1931: 343–345 and Woolley 1941: 40–41 *apud* Zarins 1986).

Donkeys start appearing in Predynastic burials in Egypt (Hollman 1990: 71 *apud* Marshall 2007: 384–385), and the earliest evidence of a donkey burial found in Israel comes from Tel Lod dated to the

EBI period (Milevski 2009 and Yannai 2008 *apud* Greenfield *et al.* 2013: 26). This evidence is contemporary with the close contacts between Egypt and Palestine, like the evidence coming from 'Azor. The burial was laid into a pit associated with a settlement. More evidence is provided from the Early Dynastic contexts from Abydos and Tarkhan in Egypt. In Abydos some 500 km south of Cairo W.M. Flinders Petrie found Early Dynastic donkey burials (dated to ca. 3000 BC) in which donkeys were buried in three consecutive and sealed grave chambers in the North Cemetery. The Abydos donkeys were not accompanying humans, did not have any grave offerings and were laid on their left sides on reed mats. In 2002 ten comparable donkey burials were discovered again in Abydos in the so-called donkey enclosures. (Petrie 1914, Rossel *et al.* 2008, Bestock 2009: 26, 56, 59). In Tarkhan three other donkey burials have been found in the Early Dynastic context (dated to 4390 ± 130 bp, i.e., Dynasty I) (Petrie 1914, Burleigh *et al.* 1991: 10, Marshall 2007).

The earliest equid burial that comes from the Arabian Peninsula seems to be connected with Mesopotamia through the Al-Ubaid culture, the predecessor of the Sumerian Uruk culture. The earliest evidence of the ritual burials of donkeys in specific comes from Egypt and Palestine and was apparently due to the mutual trade contacts. In the case of the early dynasties of Egypt and Mesopotamia the ritual treatment of equids appear especially in the households of the royal palaces.

EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FROM SYRIA AND UPPER MESOPOTAMIA

The evidence of the rituals pertaining to donkeys as sacrificial animals is present both in the archaeological and textual form in Syria including its areas of Upper Mesopotamia. However, the archaeological evidence of donkey burials from Syria and Upper Mesopotamia is later than that from Egypt and Palestine. In the Habur triangle of Syria Tell Brak, ancient Nagar, provides equid burials dating from the Early Bronze Age (Oates–Oates 1993). Finds from Tell Brak include six domesticated donkeys and one dog that were ritually buried. The dating varies from the 2580–2455 cal-BC to the Akkadian period, ca. 2200 BC (Clutton-Brock 2001). According to the texts of Ebla (the 24th century BC) from Northwestern Syria, the people acquired equids, such as valuable *kunga* hybrids, from Tell Brak/Nagar. Those animals were often used for wheeled transport, apparently for four-wheeled transport. Like Tell Beidar/Nabada, Tell Brak/Nagar was famous for its equids. Recent studies have revealed that among the human interments there might have been acrobats associated with the ritual burials of equids in the Akkadian closing ceremony of a temple precinct. (Oates *et al.* 2008: 390–400).

The Ebla texts also refer to charioteers in ceremonies and chariots and mules (BAR.AN) as diplomatic gifts from the Middle Euphrates region (Archi and Biga 2003: 15, 18). Burials of equids associated with human remains appear in the sphere of the Middle Euphrates during the EBIV period. The remains of an equid were accompanied by humans and other grave offerings such as beads and clay balls in the mortuary structure of the White Monument I at Tell Banat (Porter 2002: 331–332). At Tell Banat another equid, identified as a donkey, has also been found buried in the construction remains of a building. The finds date from the EBIV period. (McClellan 1999: 418). Donkeys buried with humans and weapons also appear in the EBIV context at Halawa on the Middle Euphrates (Orthmann 1981).

Umm el-Marra in the steppe Jabbul plain of Syria between the Euphrates and Ebla has provided several human-animal burials with equids. The excavators of Umm el-Marra have suggested that the site is probably the ancient kingdom of Tuba that was in alliance with Ebla but also under the storm god of Yamhad, the kingdom of Aleppo. (Schwartz *et al.* 2006). At Umm el-Marra dozens of equids analysed by J. Weber were found in elite graves buried in separate mudbrick installations. They date from the Early Bronze Age, i.e., the 3rd millennium BC (2500–2200 BC). In these elite tombs there were equids including highly valued *kunga* (donkey-onager) hybrids. The young ones seem to have gone through ritual killing, either as retainer sacrifices or offerings to supernatural. In some cases a puzzling feature was the combination of only human infants with equids (31 equids) and indications that the infants were sacrificed. Some burials were without human remains and were therefore solely dedicated to equids. (See Weber 2008: 500, Schwartz 2012: 19–21, see also discussions in Nichols and Weber 2006)

The identity of the Early Bronze Age people of Umm el-Marra is not clear. Were they Semites, Sumerians or Hurrians? According to the Ebla texts, in the direction of Umm el-Marra some Amorites are known to have belonged to the population of the countryside (cf. Archi 1985), and it is evident that the site belonged to the dominion of Ebla. At the end of the Early Bronze Age there is a hiatus in the occupational sequence of Umm el-Marra, and the site is occupied by the Amorites in the Middle Bronze Age. During the MBII 2nd millennium BC occupation the ritual use of equids was reiterated at the site with a notable increase. Equid hunting such as onager chasing was common in the neighbourhood. Deposits of equid bones, both from onagers and donkeys, appeared around the Acropolis area. (Curvers and Schwartz 2002–2003: 80). Bones were inserted into the foundations of houses, and one equid blocked a doorway in the Acropolis East (Schwartz *et al.* 2003: 345).

The evidence of the equid remains in the area of Umm el-Marra during the clear Amorite occupation in the Middle Bronze Age shows continuity, even increase, although there was a break in the occupation, a change in the rituals and apparently some change in the used equid species. Special emphasis seems now to be on foundation sacrifices and in connection with structures, and the equids do not appear in the funerary rituals of humans as before. As indicated above, earlier comparable evidence of the foundation sacrifices have been met in Tell Brak and Tell Banat in Syria before any clear textual evidence of the Amorite occupation, although Amorites might have belonged to the people of the area.

A vaulted tomb (G 8/9-S-37/55-2001) containing a burial of four people with an equid, apparently a donkey, has been found at Tell Arbid in Northeastern Syria in the Habur region, not far from Chagar Bazar. The tomb dates from the MBII period. (Płatkowska-Malecka and Wagnarska 2012). This is the time of the Amorite presence in the region, but also a strong connection to the Hurrian world.

TEXTUAL EVIDENCE FROM SYRO-MESOPOTAMIA

As far as the Mesopotamian textual evidence is concerned, the Old Assyrian documents report of donkey caravans in which especially Amorites were involved moving between Mesopotamia and Kanesh in Anatolia during the Middle Bronze Age. The caravans consisted of hundreds of “dark donkeys” which served as sumpters. The Assyrian merchants acquired their donkeys from the enclosure or the paddock of pack-asses in the neighbourhood of Assur. A few cuneiform documents are also known which mention the purchase of asses from *Amurru* (BM 90841 and YBC 2154), the country of the Amorites. (See Lewy 1961: 72–74). (See the modern enclosure of donkeys in Morocco in Fig. 3.)



Fig. 3. A donkey enclosure in Morocco. Photo: Minna Lönnqvist 2006.

There are several references to caravans in the Mari texts (ARM) from the Amorite era, namely the Middle Bronze Age (see Joannés 1997), and we know that the donkeys were convenient for desert travelling. As previously mentioned, donkeys were also used in rearing the flocks in Amorite tribal areas attested in the Mari texts (ARM), like today in the Middle Euphrates region and Jebel Bishri. During the survey led by the present author on Jebel Bishri in Central Syria, often identified with the “Mountain of the Amorites”, we found a way cut into rock which had carved wheel-marks for the size of a donkey cart (Lönnqvist *et al.* 2011: 331). The town of Emar up the Euphrates from Jebel Bishri

belonged to the Amorite influence already in the mid-3rd millennium BC (Archi 1985) and throughout the Mari period (ARM) in the early 2nd millennium BC. The name of the town apparently etymologically meant the “Donkey-Town” traced to the root *hmr* (cf. Hebrew *hamor*). In the Mari texts (ARM) Emarites are selling donkeys and organising donkey caravans as well. (Westenholtz 1999: 145, 152). In the Neo-Assyrian documents there is a reference to the “the Mountain of its Donkeys”, i.e., “The Mountain Characterized by its Donkeys” in the Late Bronze Age kingdom of *Amurru*. It is evident that donkeys were bred at that place and sold. According to J. Lewy, at the time ass breeding was concentrating on the district of Damascus in Syria. (See Lewy 1961: 72–74).

The frequent ritual use of equids is clearly mentioned in the Mari texts from the Amorite era: especially donkeys are sacrificed in making treaties, oaths or sealing a marriage (Weeks 2004: 118–119). The king of Mari did not seem to accept a puppy or a goat for an important sacrificial oath ritual but a donkey foal, the offspring of a she-ass (ARM II, No. 37, 11.5–14). Interestingly, the Sacred Area of Qatna provides archaeological evidence of dog sacrifices dating from the Middle Bronze Age, when Amorites were in power, the practice also attested in other sites in Syria at the time (Morandi Bonacossi 2012: 571–572). Apart from dogs, sheep, and possibly humans, were sacrificially slaughtered in Ebla as well in the Middle Bronze Age (Nigro 1998).

King of Harran and the kings of Zalmaqum with the elders of the Benjaminites, however, slaughtered a donkey in the temple of Sin in Harran that was an important site for the moon god in Mesopotamia (ARM 673: 10–12). By referring to J.-M. Durand (1988) G. Schwarz *et al.* (2003) note the existence of special sacrificial donkey festivals in the Mari texts from the Amorite era. In the 2013 Aram conference on the Amorites and Hurrians A. Haleem offered a deeper insight to the Amorite contract making practice through cylinder seals and the deals associated with the killing of a donkey, like references to the donkey sacrifices in the Mari texts. She also provided visual representations of the sacrifices of donkeys on objects. One example is a metal beaker (an Amorite beaker in the catalogue of “Ladders to Heaven”, an exhibition that took place at the Royal Ontario Museum in 1979) on which a donkey sacrifice is depicted, an item also recently published by A. Yasur-Landau (2015). The use of an obvious fenestrated axe, “the type-fossil of the Amorites”, in this ritual killing is noteworthy. For the Amorites, donkeys were clearly important ritual animals, depicted in their objects including weaponry, such as ceremonial golden daggers, in Byblos (see Fig. 4a, b, No. 14442 in Dunand 1958: 696). It is to be emphasized here that the iconography on the dagger is comparable to the representation of a donkey rider in the ceremonial metal beaker mentioned above.

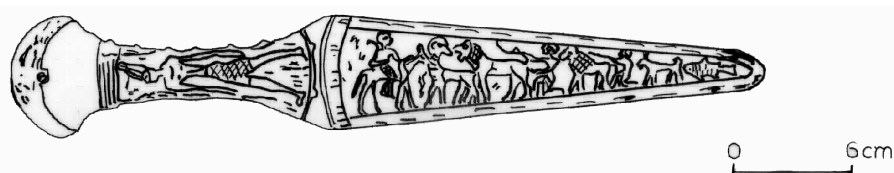


Fig. 4a. A golden dagger from Byblos illustrating donkeys on the handle and the blade.
Redrawn after Frankfort by Minna Lönnqvist

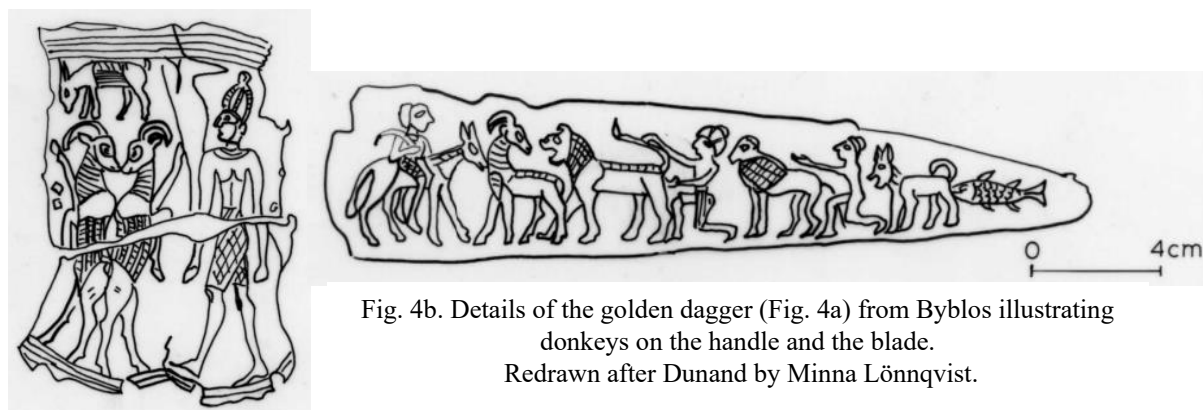


Fig. 4b. Details of the golden dagger (Fig. 4a) from Byblos illustrating donkeys on the handle and the blade.
Redrawn after Dunand by Minna Lönnqvist.

FOUND IN ISRAEL AND IN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

As previously mentioned, the equid burials from Lod – originating from Israel – date back to the EBI period. Another burial find from Israel comes from Lachish from Pit 4022 (Pl. 7: 1 and Fig. 15) and consists of humans and animal bones sealed under a plaster floor and seems to date to the EBI–EBII period as well. The site later provides evidence from the Hyksos period. (Tufnell 1958, Ussishkin 1996). The Tell es-Sakan and Tell es-Safi/Gath discoveries made in Israel are dated to the late EBIII period (Greenfield *et al.* 2012), the date being comparable to the Tell Brak, Tell Halawa, Tell Banat and Umm el-Marra finds in Syria. Of those, only Tell Banat and Tell Brak in Syro-Mesopotamia provide early foundation burials from the Early Bronze Age. As we have already discussed, the importance of the equid burials in Lower Mesopotamia is also contemporary but in those cases, like at Tell Umm el-Marra, at Tell Banat and Tell Halawa in Upper Syro-Mesopotamia, the burials were usually associated with human remains and funerary rituals in burials of the Early Bronze Age.

W.M. Flinders Petrie's (1931) excavations in Ancient Gaza at Tell el-Ajjūl, now under the Palestinian territories of Israel, were the first to reveal equid burials in the region. Ever since new discoveries have been made in the neighbourhood, and the finds made by Petrie and the more recent discoveries made in the Gaza area still as a concentration the most prominent ones in the region. Apart from the Tell el-Ajjūl finds, other examples in the neighbourhood come from Tell el-Jemmeh (Wapnish 1997), Tel Haror nearby in the Negev (Bar-Oz *et al.* 2013), Tell Abu Hureyra in Wadi Ghazza (Nigro 1998: 24) and Tell es-Sakan (de Miroschedji *et al.* 2001). As already mentioned, Tell es-Sakan find is from the EBIII period, while generally the other burials from the neighbourhood date to the MBII period.

Tell el-Ajjūl provided several equid burials associated with human interments. The burials consisted of both horses and donkeys (see Fig. 5: 1–2). One horse burial (tomb 411) contained a complete skeleton (Fig. 5: 2). According to Petrie (1931: 3), the burials with horses obviously were connected with the Hyksos. In addition, burials of four asses (tomb 101) were also discovered with human remains. They had been sacrificed and set to a higher level than the humans. In one tomb (tomb 590) different bones were found gathered at the entrance of a tomb including a horse skull, ass, gazelle, ox and human bones. The human remains were disarticulated including just a skull and some bones. (Petrie 1931: 3–5). Equids were found in the palace area as well. Some were foundation burials of the palace precinct (3rd and 4th palaces) dating from the MBII period of the Hyksos' occupation. There also was a horse burial (No. 2009) in the lower town. M. Murray in Petrie's team analysed these as foundation sacrifices, and some equid remains were considered to represent rests of feasting (Petrie *et al.* 1952: 2, 23, 32–33 also *apud* Wapnish 1997).

According to P. Wapnish (1997), who has studied and analysed the equids coming from the Tell el-Jemmeh excavations in the Gaza district, one equid baby burial appeared to be a foundation burial in a wall. The ribs and vertebrae had been exposed *in situ* but the head and limbs were minimally defined. It appeared to have been buried in a sitting position, but because of its young age its species remained undefined. Other bones including a skull of an ass was found in another pit burial. The first burial near a wall was clearly sacrificial in nature. At Tell Jemmeh donkeys were relatively uncommon in the osteological material from the tell. The use of donkeys at the site was defined, and beside being draft animals they were utilized for their skin and even sometimes eaten. (Wapnish 1997: 337–343). As previously mentioned, like the finds from Tell el-Ajjūl the Tell el-Jemmeh evidence dates from the MBII period of the Hyksos influence in the region.

The contemporary evidence from Tel Haror (Bar-Oz *et al.* 2013) elucidates very clearly the ritual nature of a donkey burial, being an apparent foundation sacrifice in a temple precinct comprising various cultic activities. The fully articulated donkey in a pit inside a rectangular offering chamber was wearing saddlebags and metal bridles, which provides unique evidence of harnessing equids in front of chariots or used as pack-animals. The position of the equid resembles the finds from the palace area of Tell el-Ajjūl and those of Tell el-Jemmeh under structures in the same district. The authors of the article on the Tel Haror burial refer to the sacrificial custom as an "Amorite" tradition. Due to the archaeological context the excavators think that prior to the sacrifice a special ceremony was carried out at the temple that was of the Syrian type in the area of the site. There were remnants of a ritual feast repast in the area including sheep and goat bones.

Beside the Gaza region and the sites of Lod and Lachish, there are other sites providing equid burials in Israel and Palestinian territories such as Jericho, Tell Far'ah (N), Azor, Acco (Wapnish 1997, Way 2010: 211, Bar-Oz *et al.* 2013), Tell Mique-Ekron (Greenfield *et al.* 2012: 260) and Tel Aviv (ancient Jaffa, pers. communication with Aaron Burke 2013). The Jericho burial from the MBII period was set into an earlier Intermediate Bronze Age (the EBIV/MBI) rock-cut tomb that in this way became re-used. The burial included human remains and probably half-asses the remains of which consisted of three skulls and forelegs in the fill of a shaft leading to the tomb. The tomb was clearly a warrior burial, according to K. Kenyon, as there were two daggers and a battle axe accompanying the deceased young man in a separate chamber. There was associated fine pottery with a beaker modelled like a ram's head and a beautiful metal belt. (Kenyon 1960: 306–308, 535–536).

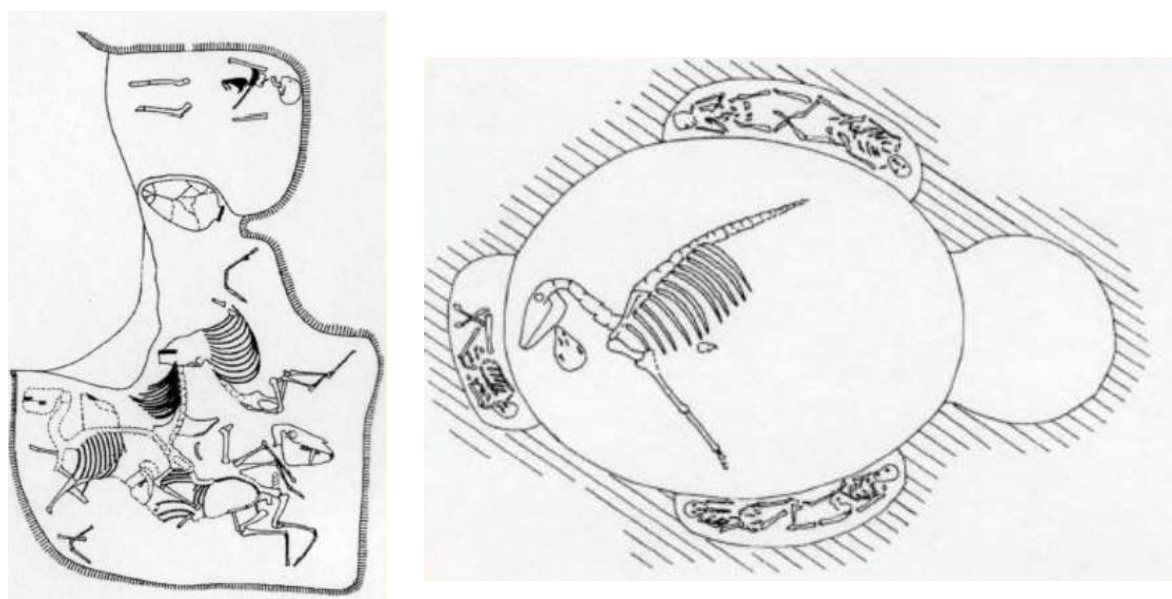


Fig. 5. Equid burials from Tell el-Ajjul in Gaza. Source: Petrie 1931.

THE EGYPTIAN EVIDENCE FROM THE HYKSOS PERIOD

The famous funeral paintings from Beni Hasan (Tomb No. 3) on the eastern edge of the Nile between the towns of Minyeh and Roda depicts an Asiatic donkey caravan coming from Egypt (Newberry–Fraser 1893: Pls. XXX, XXXI), like the carvings depicting Asiatics with their donkeys discovered in Sinai (Gardiner–Peet 1917, IS I: Pl. XXXVI). These illustrations, also noted by M. Bietak (1997), E. Oren (1997) and H. Greenfield *et al.* (2012) in their publications, are dated to the MBII period. The people in the paintings and carvings are associated with the *'aamu* people, namely Asiatics coming from Syria-Palestine, like the Hyksos. Interestingly, there are other earlier depictions of laden donkeys comparable with those in Beni Hasan in the funerary painting of Iti's and Neferu's tomb from Egypt (now in the collections of the Egyptian Museum of Turin). They already date from the First Intermediate period (2118–1980 BC), when the Asiatic incursions against Egypt were already taking place (Lönnqvist 2008, Silver, forthcoming in the RAI 60 proceedings).

The foreign Hyksos rule in Egypt extended from Hermopolis to Pi-hathor in the Nile Delta (Redford 1997: 22) and existed during the XV and the XVI dynasties according to the Royal Turin Canon. It started ca. 1674 BC and ended ca. 1540 BC, but the Asiatic presence in the Delta area had begun earlier. Burials of Western Asiatics dating already from the 18th century BC were also found from Stratum G in Area F at Tell el-Dab'a showing communal burial customs of families but without any reported sacrificed equids (Bietak 1997: 105, Fig. 4.19). In the Egyptian style palace precinct of the XIII dynasty equid burials were found at the entrance section of a tomb. The tomb belonged to a dignitary called *'aamu* (Bietak 1997: 103), i.e., Asiatic. Bietak assumes that such graves in Tell el-Dab'a can belong to the trading expedition leaders of donkey caravans such as illustrated in the Beni

Hasan wall paintings and also in the Sinai carvings. Apart from Tell el-Dab'a/Avaris (Bietak 1997), other equid burials dating from the MBII period come from the Hyksos occupation of Tell Makshuta (Holladay ed. 1982: 247, Holladay 1997) and Inshas (van den Brink 1982: 74–77) in the eastern Delta district.

According to Bietak (1997), the palace tombs comprising Asiatics at Tell el-Dab'a were built of bricks and had been vaulted, resembling the local Egyptian tombs. However, such brick-built chamber graves are also known - as mentioned - from Kish in Mesopotamia dating from the Sumerian Early Dynastic period, and in Syria in the Middle-Euphrates region at Habuba Kabira and Qara Quzaq dating already from the Early Bronze Age (see Cooper 2006: 213–214, 225–226, see also discussion on p. 248). Comparable tombs have also recently been found at the mentioned site of Tell Arbid in Northeastern Syria in the crossroads of the Amorite and Hurrian influences comprising a donkey burial dating from the MBII period (cf. Płatkowska-Malecka and Wagnarska 2012), being contemporary with the Hyksos rule in Egypt. Even if Bietak (1997: 103) compares the Tell Dab'a structures to the Egyptian ones, he acknowledges that the burial customs of the tombs associated with donkeys find closer contemporary parallels in Syro-Mesopotamia than in Egypt.

The position of the equids in Stratum E/1 of the Area F cemetery at Tell el-Dab'a is similar to the donkey burials of Tell Makshuta in the Delta region and the Gaza region with some evidence of horse bones as well (Holladay 1997: 186). It seems that the equids in Tell el-Dab'a were not simply buried but had been ritually sacrificed as well. J.S. Holladay (1997: 201) sees that Tell Makshuta was especially located for the purpose of the trade between Egypt and Palestine. Donkeys were prominent in the excavated equid remains associated with tombs, horses being more marginal in them like in Tell el-Dab'a. The animals were important for the economy and also for ritual symbolism. At Tell Makshuta the donkeys had been sacrificed and buried in pits that were marked with offerings of weapons in front of tombs (Holladay 1997: 195). Holladay (1997: 223) takes a view that the donkey burials were signifying status in tombs L 12312, L 12317 and L 2029/2018. That would fit with the Amorite traditions mentioned in the texts.

Bietak (1997: 97) earlier designated the Hyksos material culture as being Syro-Palestinian and represented by Canaanites. But as indicated, not only in the onomastics of the Hyksos but also in their material culture there are clear features of the Amorite influence from Syria and some Hurrian impact is detectable as well. Bietak (1997: 97–98) assumes that the origins of the people derived from Byblos, a site which belongs to the coast of Ancient Syria, modern Lebanon. It needs to be mentioned here that Byblos was ruled by the Amorites during the late Early Bronze Age and Middle Bronze Age (see Kitchen 1967: 39–54, Saghih 1983: 132). As previously referred to, the linguistic evidence supports the amalgamation of the cultural elements in the Hyksos material culture or with similar population that existed in the Syro-Palestinian sites of the Middle Bronze Age.

Egypt and the Gaza region leave us with many questions about the Hurro-Amorite influence on the Hyksos ritual practices in the case of the horse and donkey burials. As indicated above, the Predynastic Ma'adi culture in Egypt had a close connection with the contemporaneous culture in Palestine. Ma'adi was even populated by traders from Palestine in the EBI period and includes evidence of donkey burials. (Kantor 1992: 12–13). The fact that donkey burials had the local Predynastic tradition in Egypt and that there were sites related to the Palestinian pastoral cultures in Egypt have to be taken into account. I have earlier traced material roots of the Amorite cultural ancestry deriving from the pastoral technocomplex of the Greater Southwest Asian Arid Zone defined by J. Zarins (1992) and to semi-pastoral Ghassul/Beersheba culture of Palestine with the features continuing in the EBI period in Palestine (Lönnqvist 2000: 85–107).

The Al-Ubaid-related finds from Kuwait and the Mesopotamian evidence from Kish, Abu Salabikh and Ur seem to bear connections to the Sumerian civilization. However, the Semitic Kish civilization (see Gelb 1981, 1992) and its relation to the sites such as Kish and Abu Salabikh providing equid burials cannot be ignored in the emergence of the West Semites such as Amorites and their ritual world either. The timing of the rise of equid burials during the Hurrian presence in Northern Syria is the same as in Mesopotamia and Palestine among the Sumerians and the Semites, namely the Early Bronze Age, the 3rd millennium BC. As previously mentioned, the Hurrian custom of burying equids, especially horses, apparently derives from the Eurasian influence. During the Middle Bronze Age the donkey rituals became distinctively Amorite-related rituals in Syria-Palestine. It is the district where

the origins of the Hyksos have also been looked for. Interestingly, the Delta and the Gaza regions are also the Hyksos' areas which overlap the influence zone between Egypt and Palestine and the donkey transport in much earlier time in the 4th millennium BC.

As far as the evidence of the Semitic or Hyksos contacts between Egypt and Palestine is concerned, the Biblical tradition of Jacob and his sons, especially Joseph, is often mentioned in the case of the Semitic occupation in the Delta region. Interestingly, in the Jacob story there also seems to be a reference to a ruler, whose name is Hamor, i.e. donkey, who has a princely son Schechem (Gen. 34), also a place known in Canaan (Gen 33: 18). *Benē hamor* may refer to a clan bearing the same name as well. There is also evidence of the agreement and oath rituals comprising a donkey in the Bible. (Oren 1997: 266).

THE LEVANTINE VARIA IN THE BURIAL CUSTOMS OF EQUIDS

As previously mentioned, the earliest evidence of an equid burial in the Near East seems to come from the Ubaid context in Kuwait in Arabia and is that of an onager buried with human remains. The earliest donkey burials are known from Predynastic Egypt and the EBI context from Israel. These early burials from Egypt and Israel were not associated with human remains. The equid burials spread all over the core areas of the Near East during the Bronze Age. The evidence from the Early Bronze to the Middle Bronze Age in this article has covered Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine and Egypt. (See Fig. 6.). The use of equids in rituals in general was widespread and included the world of the Sumerians, Egyptians, Semites (including Amorites), Hurrians, Hyksos and the Hittites in the Near East during the Bronze Age.



Fig. 6. Distribution of the equid burials in the Near East.

If we tabulate (see Table 1.) the known ways of burying equids in Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine and Egypt, we see how the tomb/grave burials of equids with humans provide the widest spread phenomenon in the Near East, and in those cases various species of equids were used. The table also shows how Syro-Mesopotamia, Syria-Palestine or the Levant seem to have had the most varied evidence in the customs of the equid sacrifices including tomb/grave burials, foundation burials, sacrifices for oaths and agreements as well as feasting. This varied evidence dates from the Early and Middle Bronze Age becoming pronounced in the MBII period. It is visible that in the cases (except at Tell Jemmeh where one young equid species was unidentified) of the foundation burials and the sacrifices for agreements and oaths donkeys were especially used as sacrificial animals. It is possible that the burial custom associated with building foundations included executing agreements or oaths as well. This could also be the case when equids were buried alone in a tomb.

EARLY AND MIDDLE BRONZE AGE	EQUID SACRIFICES	AND BURIALS		
equids sacrificed and buried with human remains in a grave (various species)	archaeological evidence	Arabia Syro-Meopotamia	Syria-Palestine	Egypt
equids sacrificed and buried without human remains in a grave (donkeys)	archaeological evidence	Syro-Mesopotamia	Syria-Palestine	Egypt
equids sacrificed for foundation burials (donkeys)	archaeological evidence	Syro-Mesopotamia	Syria-Palestine	
equids sacrificed for oaths and agreements (donkeys)	textual evidence, archaeological evidence (illustrated objects)	Syro-Mesopotamia	Syria-Palestine	

Table 1.

Syria-Palestine or the Levant became the hub of combining different cultural elements (see Fig. 7.) from the North, East and South. There seems to be differences in rituals and in used species between and inside the cultures. Donkeys were already sacrificed and used in the funerary rituals in Syro-Mesopotamia and in Egypt before the acme of the Hurro-Amorite influence of the 2nd millennium BC, when donkeys clearly became the focus of the Amorite rituals. The crystallization of the ritual customs is well attested in the archaeological and textual evidence of Syria-Palestine. The use of the horse came from the North and advanced with the Hurro-Amorite cultures reaching Egypt, where it also was applied to burial rituals during the Hyksos occupation. In Egypt in the Hyksos sites, as far as we know, there are only tomb burials with humans and no foundation burials like during the Hyksos occupation in Gaza.

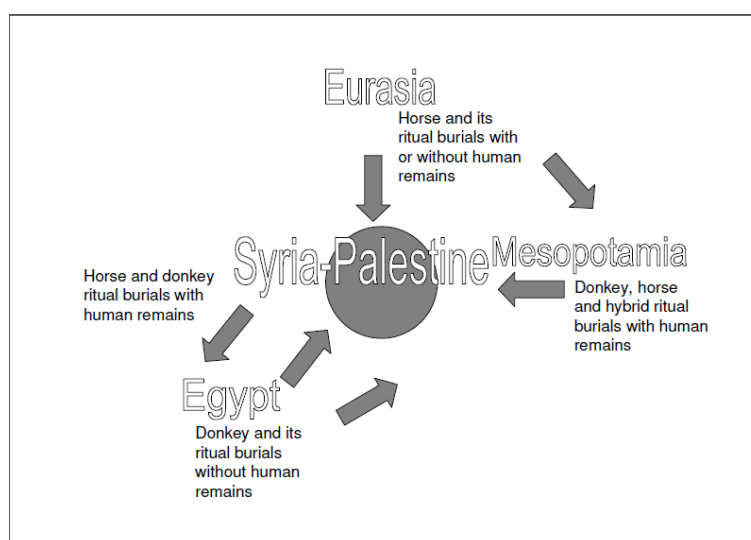


Fig. 7. A hypothetical scheme of influences and the deployment of equid burials in the Near East during the Bronze Age.

CONCLUSIONS

The adaptation of equids to the funerary rituals in the Near East may have been a two-three-folded process. Horses and donkeys were apparently domesticated in the 5th-4th millennium BC in different geographical areas. Horses were tamed in Eurasia while wild asses belonged to the African breed of equids, if not to the Asian ones. Eurasia apparently played an important role and may have been the source for the early equid rituals in the Mesopotamian cultural sphere. The domesticated horse was probably known, although not common in Mesopotamia, already in the 4th millennium BC. The Hurrians came to Syria from the direction of Eurasia and the home of the domesticated horse, while the Amorites as West Semites were home in Syria-Palestine neighbouring Egypt, where the use of donkey had been prominent.

The apparent earliest site of an equid burial in Arabia (Kuwait) provides a cultural link to Mesopotamia. The burial is also comparable to the evidence from the Eurasian steppes, where the custom of burying equids with humans in *tumuli* seems to have been a long-lived tradition. It may well be that the practice burying humans with equids came from the North to Mesopotamia. In any event, donkeys were already hunted in the Levant during the Palaeolithic Age. If not indigenous to the Levant, the domesticated donkey apparently came from the direction of Egypt to Syria-Palestine. Donkeys as the earliest domesticated equids in Egypt and Palestine also became the earliest ritually killed and buried equids in those areas. In the Levantine world, where horse or camel was not common yet, the donkey was the most valuable of all the laden animals.

In the Amorite world the donkey was kept as the major burden carrying animal as well as a draft-animal for pulling carts, ploughing and used by shepherds rearing their flocks. The Hurrians apparently played a central role in the promulgation of the horse to Syria and the beginning of its breeding in Amorite ruled sites. Horses were appreciated and even worshipped by the Hurrians. It seems that during the spread and the time of the co-habitation of the Hurrians and Amorites, even their coeval occupation of the same sites, the equids were valued, and the custom of equid burials spread during the Hurro-Amorite dominance around Syria-Palestine.

Single donkey burials in specific may have emerged in Egypt and spread to the Levant already at the beginning of the Early Bronze Age. Influences for adapting the custom of burying equids with humans in Syria and Upper Mesopotamia seems generally to have come from Lower Mesopotamia and Eurasia, however, but the use of donkeys in specific may have been influenced by Palestine and Egypt. Intercourse with various areas seems to have brought the practice to associate humans with equids from the North through the Syro-Mesopotamian sphere to Palestine and Egypt. It is evident that Hurrian, Sumerian and Semitic including Amorite and Egyptian worlds all came into play in that amalgamation process.

Interestingly, we find both horse burials and burials of donkeys among the Hyksos rituals. There are tombs with human remains as well as foundation burials. Most apparently the sacrificial and burial practices among the Hyksos emerged as the part of their cultural background deriving from the Hurro-Amorite amalgamation of the equid sacrifices and burials in Syria-Palestine. Equids were used in the foundation rituals during the MBII Amorite occupation in Umm el-Marra in Syria. The tomb and temple types of the Hyksos follow the Syrian religious world from the Amorite era as do the foundation rituals in the Gaza district. Whether the foundation rituals were the original invention of the Amorites is hard to judge, because the Early Bronze Age evidence of such rituals comes both from Palestine (Tell es-Safi and Tell es-Savvan) and Syro-Mesopotamia (Tell Brak and Tell Banat).

In any event, donkeys became important sacrificial animals for the Amorites in specific appearing in their grave/tomb burials, foundation rituals, agreement ceremonies, oath-binding and feasting. The donkey was apparently chosen for sacrificial use because it was seen as a valuable, a superior animal in transportation. In the Ancient Near East usually only valuable animals were worth for ritual sacrifices. The Amorite ceremonial items, such as a ceremonial beaker, a golden dagger of ceremonial type and seals depict donkeys. The donkeys may also have carried totemic meanings associated with the Amorites and their tribes or clans as indicated in the Bible. Like expressed in the article by Greenfield *et al.* (2012), in the modern world the donkey has become the symbol of stupidity: a dummy, a stubborn animal. Donkeys are not appreciated in the way the ancients may have apprehended their value. There is a well-known old saying in the Near East referring to the past but

vanished glory of the donkey and goes in a way like this: *All the glory of the donkey has vanished; in the past the donkey was worth of gold but now it is not worth even a penny.*

Shepherds were the archetypes of kings in Ancient Mesopotamia, and shepherds often rode on donkeys. The royal processions included donkeys, onagers or hybrids, and for kings in Ancient Mesopotamia donkey was a more valuable to ride on than a horse (Saggs 2000: 115). An image of a king entering the city of Babylon riding on a donkey finds parallels in the Bible. Donkeys were worth for royalty, reflected in the biblical image of the Messianic king, arriving into a city riding on a donkey both in the Tanach, i.e., the Old Testament (Zechariah 9: 9) and the New Testament (John 12: 14).

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