Rooster

I. Introduction. In the Mesopotamian and Hellenic (→IDD 2) world the r. was associated with Persia, respectively the East, from whence the bird was imported (BRENTJES 1962: 32; TULPIN 1992: 125). Scholarship has traditionally ascribed both solar and lunar significance to the r. Solar symbolism arises most obviously from the r.’s crow at dawn. Representations of r.s from Egypt and the Levant are rare and do not allow one to pinpoint a particular religious significance of the bird.

II. Typology

II.1. Phenotypes

The r. is distinguishable from other birds in visual representations by its comb (1*–5), wattle, and upturned tail feathers. In the glyptic of the 6th/5th cent., when the r. is most popular, the bird may appear alone (6–12*; LEGRAND 1925: nos. 771–773; LEGRAND 1951: nos. 823–826; PRITCHARD 1962: fig. 90); perched on a plinth or pedestal (13–14; DELAPORTE 1910: pl. 35:530; WEBER 1920: no. 463; EHRENBerg 2000: nos. 23–24); on (15*–16) or next to (17) a →lampstand, perhaps even supporting the latter on its back (WUNSCH 1999–2000: 254, left edge bottom; EHRENBerg 2002: 57); or on a censer (18). On a 14th cent. pyxis from Assur the r. is depicted as perching on a tree (19); for related motifs on Neo-Babylonian and Persian seals see LEGRAND 1925: no. 770 and WARD 1910: no. 1126.

R.s may also be depicted confronting each other (20–22; most likely also 23; an Iranian pottery painting from Tepe Gyan IV dating to the end of the 3rd mill. depicts two r.s in a row: CONTEAU/GHIRSMAN 1935: pl. 36:8); flanking a →monkey (24); or simply in a field (25–26; WARD 1910: no. 1126). The head alone is represented on Luristan bronzes (27*) and possibly forms the spout of a zoomorphic vessel from Beer-sheba (AHARONI 1973: pl. 28.2).

II.2. Associations

1. ASSOCIATED WITH DEITIES/DEMONS

1.1. Moon god. When more than one symbol is associated with the r. (6, 15*), the crescent (→Celestial bodies and symbols [ANE]) is always among them, implying a lunar connection. →Nusku’s genealogy as the son of the moon god →Sin may explain the coexistence of the r. and crescent on some seals (6, 9, 11, 13–15*; WEBER 1920: no. 463; LEGRAND 1925: no. 770).

1.2. Auramazda. On an Achaemenid cylinder seal (18) a r. hovers above a censer, which was associated at that time with →Auramazda, underlining the bird’s continued association with light and fire.

1.3. Bes. A unique stamp seal impression from the Persepolis Treasury shows the Egyptian dwarf god Bes with his one hand typically resting on his thigh, while the other is outstretched to the side holding a r. by its throat (5). For the association of a r. with B. see also →Bes 512.

1.4. Winged genius. A conoid acquired by LAYARD at Babylon (14) shows a typical adoration scene, but instead of a human worshipper (see § II.2.3) a winged genius is depicted with the r.

1.5. Master-of-animals. On Luristan finials the r.’s head is associated with a hybrid master-of-animals grasping the necks of flaming animals (27*; see also GODARD 1931: pl. 45:175).

2. ASSOCIATED WITH ANIMALS

On the silver bowl from the Tell Basta Treasure (4) a r. is associated with →ostriches (see also →Ostrich 66 for a r. and an ostrich on a Late Hittite relief from Tell Halaf) and hens or chicks; on a cylinder seal from Kish (22) two confronting r.s appear together with a →caprid, →lion-dragon (see also 25), and unidentified quadruiped; 24 associates the r. with a →monkey.

3. ASSOCIATED WITH HUMANS: Worshippers. On Mesopotamian seals with adoration scenes the r. may be an object of devotion associated with a worshipper (13, 15*–16, 18; EHRENBerg 2000: nos. 23–24) and in Palestine/Israel the r. decorates a personal name seal (10*; see also AVIGAD/SASS 1997: no. 13, fake?). On the Egyptian tomb relief 3 the r. stands between the enthroned owner of the relief and a harp player.

III. Sources

III.1. Chronological range. R.s appear quite infrequently in the visual arts. In Indian art examples date back to the 3rd mill. (BRENTJES 1962: 644). The earliest known Mesopotamian representation occurs on a 14th cent. Assyrian ivory pyxis from Assur (19). Ostracoon 2* from the Valley of the Kings at Thebes dates to the 13th cent. and silver bowl 4 from Babastis to about 1200. The stamp seal from el–Jib with confronting cocks (23) stems from a 12th–9th cent. tomb. An 11th cent. date is assigned to a golden goblet from Iran (26). The few cylinder seals date to the 9th–7th cent. (22, 24–25) and the Luristan bronze 27 and possibly a r.–spouted vessel from Beersheba (AHARONI 1973: pl. 28:2) belong to the 8th cent. Two handles with incised r.s from el–Jib (12*; PRITCHARD 1962: fig. 90) roughly date to Iron Age II. However, most depic-
tions (5–11, 13–18, 20–21) come from the 6th/5th cent. A late rendering of the motif is the Egyptian tomb relief 3 dating to the 4th cent.

III.1. Geographical distribution.

In the time frame under consideration the r. as iconographic motif appears beyond Mesopotamia (6–7, 11, 13–18, 19–22) and Iran (5, 8, 16, 26–27). It also appears in the Levant (9), particularly in Judea (10*, 12, 23) and the Negev (1*, see possibly also AHARONI 1973: pl. 28:2) and Egypt (2*, 4), though rarely.

III.2. Object types. The r. as iconographic motif is often found in the glyptic arts (5–11, 13–18, 20–25), but can also be displayed on vessels made of gold (26), silver (4), or ivory (19), crafted as bronze figurines (27; see also GODARD 1931: pls. 30B; 45:175; SPELEERS 1932: fig. 9) or terracottas (1*). It also decorates tomb reliefs (3) and is painted on an ostracon (2*) and incised on jar handles (12*, PRITCHARD 1962: fig. 90). For a possibly r.-shaped spout of a zoomorphic vessel from Beersheba, see AHARONI 1973: pl. 28:2.

IV. Conclusion. In Mesopotamian glyptic the r. can be found in places reserved for divine symbols (on pedestals, receiving adoration of a worshiper) and must therefore have divine significance, a role which cannot be ascribed to the few Egyptian representations of the bird. A number of examples show the r. on a lampstand rather than a pedestal. A lampstand with a →lamp is the Mesopotamian symbol for →Nusku, god of light and fire. The substitution of the r. for the lamp in these examples and a few other glyptic scenes in which the r. is juxtaposed with a lampstand (17; see also WUNSCH 1999–2000: 254 left edge bottom; EHRENBERG 2002: 57) indicates that the two were interchangeable and the r. represents Nusku, or light. Nusku rose to prominence in Mesopotamia in the first half of the 1st mill. at the same time that the r. becomes more prominent in the art, which may not be a coincidence. 1st mill. textual references support the connection between the r. and Nusku. The “Birdcall Text” (LAMBERT 1970: 111–117) dating to the 1st mill., of which two versions exist, gives varying bird identifications for Nusku including r., as well as two other birds interpreted as crested birds. One of the versions presents the r. as the god of the underworld, which may reflect the postulated dual role of the bird in Iran. There it was believed to be an apotropaic animal of dawn who announces the arrival of light/→Aramazd and chases away the evil of darkness/Ahriman, but is also a guardian of the night who guides souls to heaven (see →Nusku § I). The various Mesopotamian examples cited, visual and textual, point strongly to Nusku/light as the r.’s symbolic identity. Unique is the constellation with the god →Bes casually resting his one hand on this thigh with the other holding a r.

Although a lunar connection to the r. is attested on the Levantine coast (9), other representations from Palestine/Israel (10*, 12*, 23; and possibly AHARONI 1973: pl. 28:2) do not allow the formulation of a particular religious—historical significance of the bird, although it occurs in a cultic context as at the Edomite shrine of Horvat Qitmit (1*).
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