

Desmond Morris

The Art of Ancient Cyprus

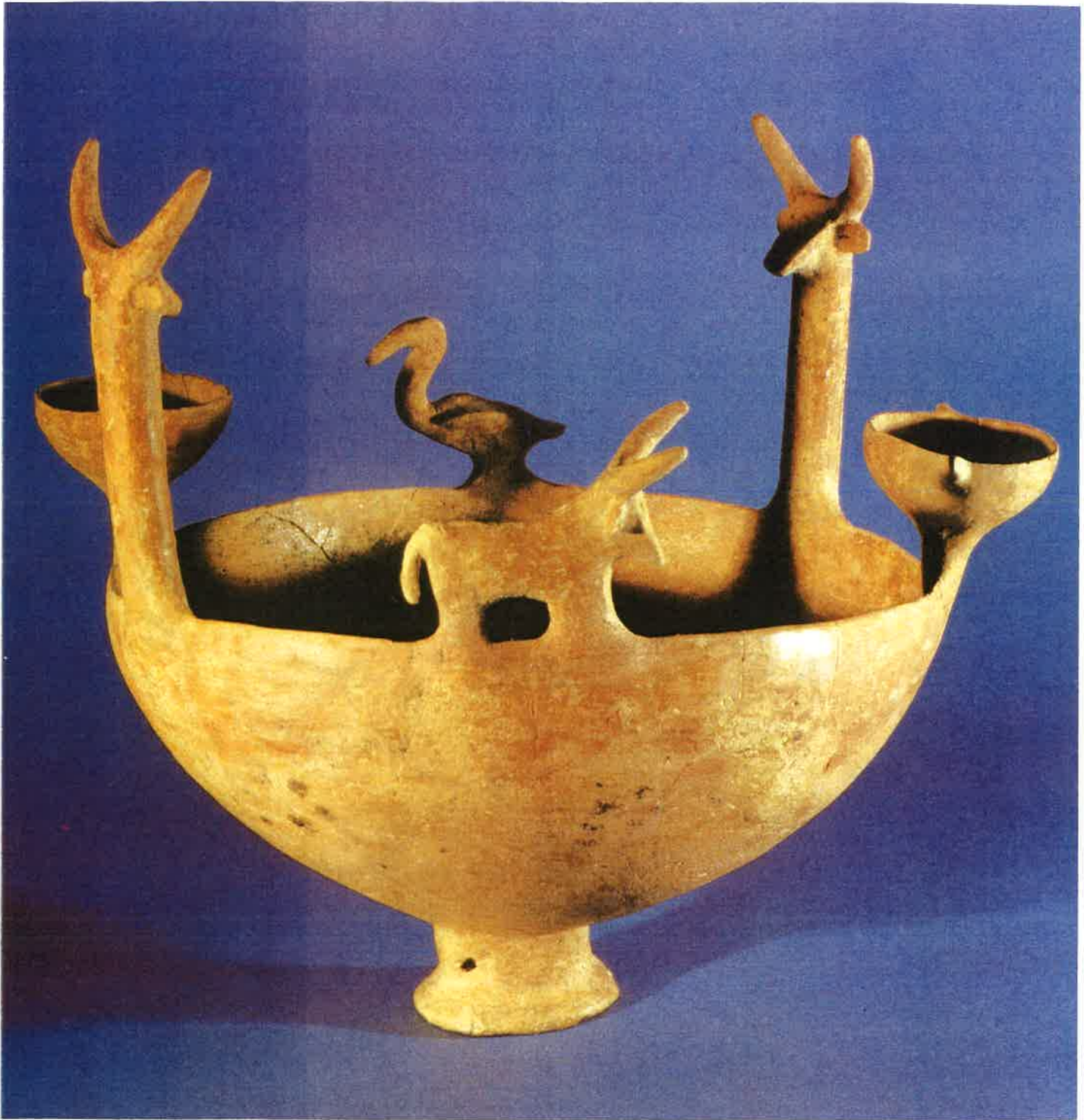
with a check-list of the author's collection

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2 Cattle

The evidence for cattle in Cyprus before the start of the Bronze Age is almost non-existent. Nothing is known from Khirokitia, Sotira, Erimi or Dhali-Agridhi, the only large animals there being the deer. A solitary cattle bone was reported from the early north

coast site of Ayios Epiktitos Vrysi, but it was so outnumbered by deer, sheep and goat bones that it was little more than an oddity and certainly does not reflect a significant presence of bovids on the island prior to the dawn of the Bronze Age.

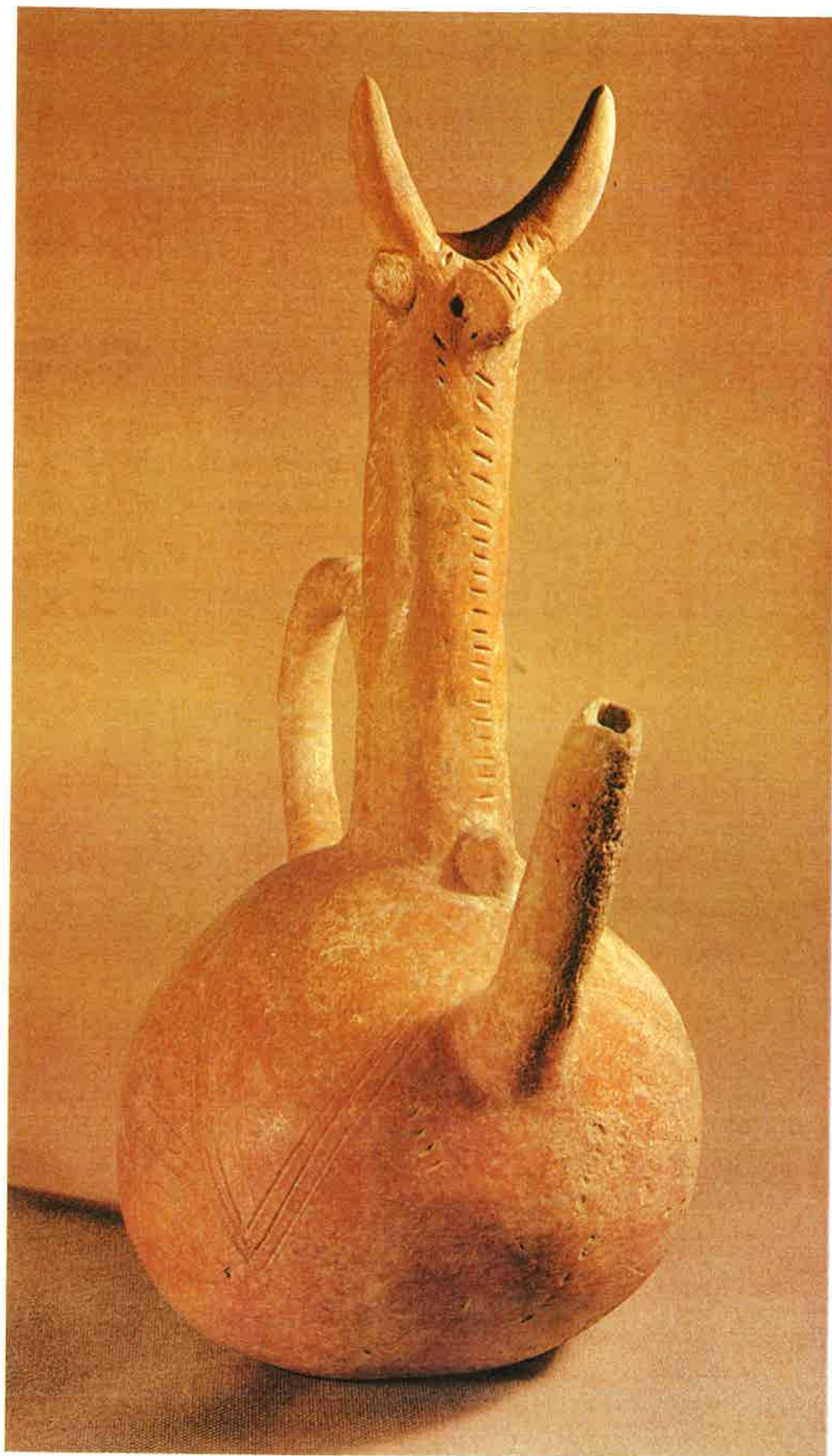


Pl. 219

2 Cattle

Pl. 219 Bull motifs on a large bowl with stem base. Modelled figures rise from the rim of the bowl, as follows: A bull shown standing on four legs. A pair of opposed, bucranian poles, with bulls' heads perched on the top of very long stems. A vulture. A pair of shallow, subsidiary bowls on short stems. This unique vessel displays both types of early bull motif, alongside one another. Plain Red Polished Ware, Early Bronze Age. Ht. 34.5 cm. Rim diam. 30 cm (DM-PRP-39).

Pl. 220 Bucranial jug. A round-based jug with a tall neck topped by a bull's head. The side-spout becomes transformed into a phallic display. There is a tail-stump at the back of the 'body'. Incised Red Polished Ware, Early Bronze Age. Ht. 24 cm (DM-IRP-93). Horn-tips restored.



Pl. 220

With Vounous the whole scene changes dramatically. Cattle have arrived in force. Peltenburg (personal communication, 1974) comments: 'Their sudden appearance in domesticated form at Early Bronze Age Vounous certainly could be taken as an importation, especially when one considers all the other artefactual evidence for a very close connection at this juncture between Cyprus and Anatolia where cattle, as a domesticated species, were already known for millennia.'

It seems as if the new settlers from the north brought with them, not only their new pottery styles, but also their favourite animals—both in their practical and their symbolic roles, for there were more than cattle bones left behind. In addition, there were many images of cattle, as figurines, decorations on vessels, and as elements of scenic compositions (see pp. 285-6).

These cattle images do not seem to have been totemic, however, for they do not compete with the images of the already well-established deer. Indeed, there are certain vessels on which both deer and cattle appear,

and there is a Red Polished figurine in the Ashmolean (Brown and Catling, 1980, no. 22) which has a stag's head at one end and a bull's head at the other. Brown and Catling comment: 'The combination of both bull and stag suggests an exceptional interest in potency.' Their idea appears to be that the masculine heads of two large ungulates combine as a 'male power' symbol of double strength. Whether the symbolism of this power was primarily concerned with fertility or with protection is difficult to resolve, but whichever way it is taken, the essential feature of the role of these horned and antlered heads is that, instead of being emblematic of particular social groups or factions, they are carrying much the same message as one another, that message being embodied in the powerful masculine nature which they share, rather than in their differences. In other words, when cattle arrived on the scene, they added to the deer as forceful images, rather than competed with them. In another Ashmolean piece, a large Red Polished bowl with modelled animals around its rim (Brown and Catling, 1980, no. 17), there are goats

2 Cattle

Pl. 221 Standing bull. Solid figurine with short, stocky legs. Incised Red Polished Ware. Early Bronze Age. Length 11.6 cm. Ht. 5.3 cm (DM-IRP-92).



Pl. 221

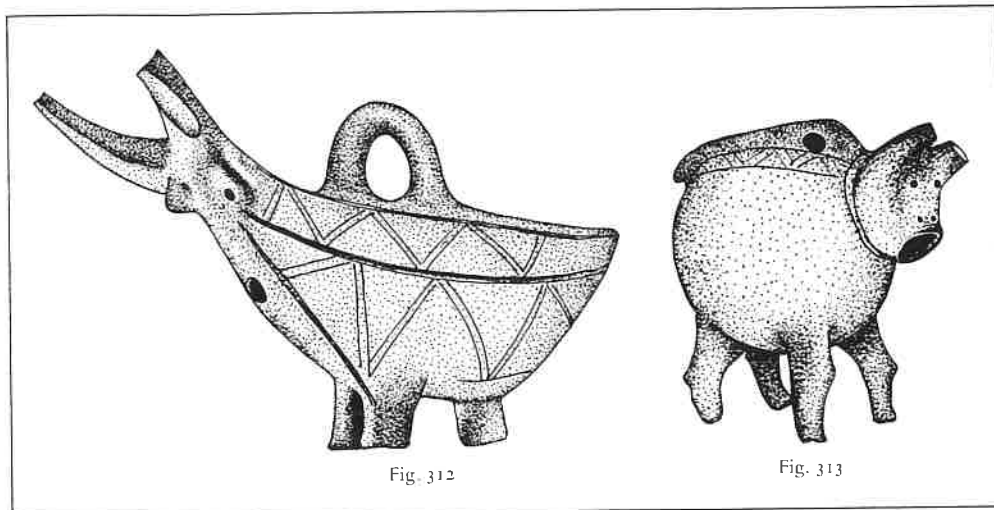


Fig. 312

Fig. 313

mixed with deer, suggesting that almost any powerful horned head will do and that the specific type of ungulate involved is almost irrelevant.

If one surveys the different kinds of cattle image used in the Early Bronze Age, it soon emerges that there are two distinct types. These can be called the 'Standing Bull' and the 'Bucranial Terminal'. Pl. 221 and Figs. 312-15 represent the Standing Bull category. As isolated figurines these are comparatively rare, but they are quite common as elements in scenic compositions such as ploughing scenes (see pp. 285-6). They seem to be representing the bull in its more docile, domesticated role. But the Bucranial Terminals are another matter. These consist of a bull's head protruding from the rim or neck or shoulder of a vessel (see Pls. 219, 220 and

222, and Figs. 316-25) and their role is more aggressively masculine. Triple bucrania appear on scenic models from Vounous (Fig. 495) and Margi (Figs. 496-7), where three bulls' heads are placed on top of three poles or pillars set side by side on some sort of wall. They tower over the tiny human figures, implying that they were high up and dramatically conspicuous.

Two examples deserve special mention. The bucranian jug (Pl. 220) adds to the virility and power of its symbolism with a strongly phallic spout. The effect is a bull rampant with sexual energy. The large bowl with modelled figures on its rim (Pl. 219) is a remarkable example of a Red Polished Ware creation which presents both types of cattle image on the same vessel. There are two towering bucranian 'poles', two subsidiary

2 Cattle

Figs. 312-13 Bull figures, Red Polished Ware. Early Bronze Age.

Fig. 312 No provenance (Cyprus Museum). Ht. 23 cm. Karageorghis 1971, Fig. 51.

Fig. 313 No provenance (University of California, Robert Lowie Museum). Ht. 11.4 cm. Karageorghis et al. 1974, no. 15.

Figs. 314-15 Bull figures, Red Polished Ware. Early Bronze Age.

Fig. 314 Soloi. Ht. 13 cm. Buchholz and Karageorghis 1973, no. 1525.

Fig. 315 No provenance (Cyprus Museum). Ht. 8.6 cm. Des Gagniers and Karageorghis 1976, Pl. XLV III, 1.

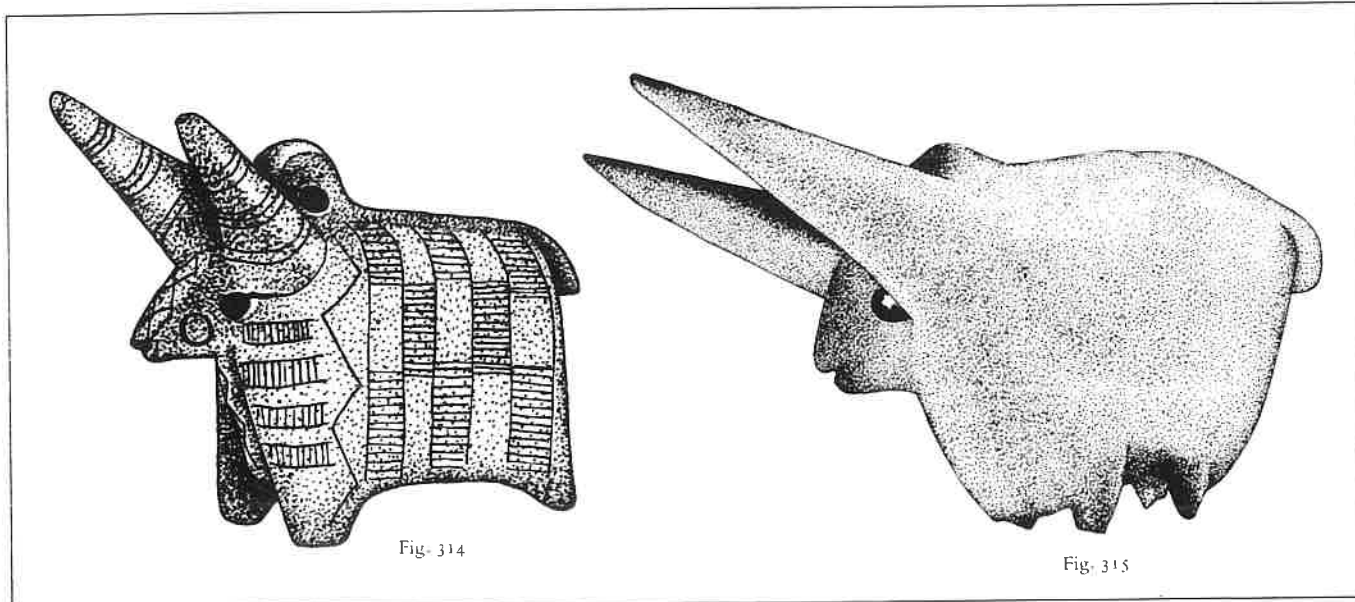
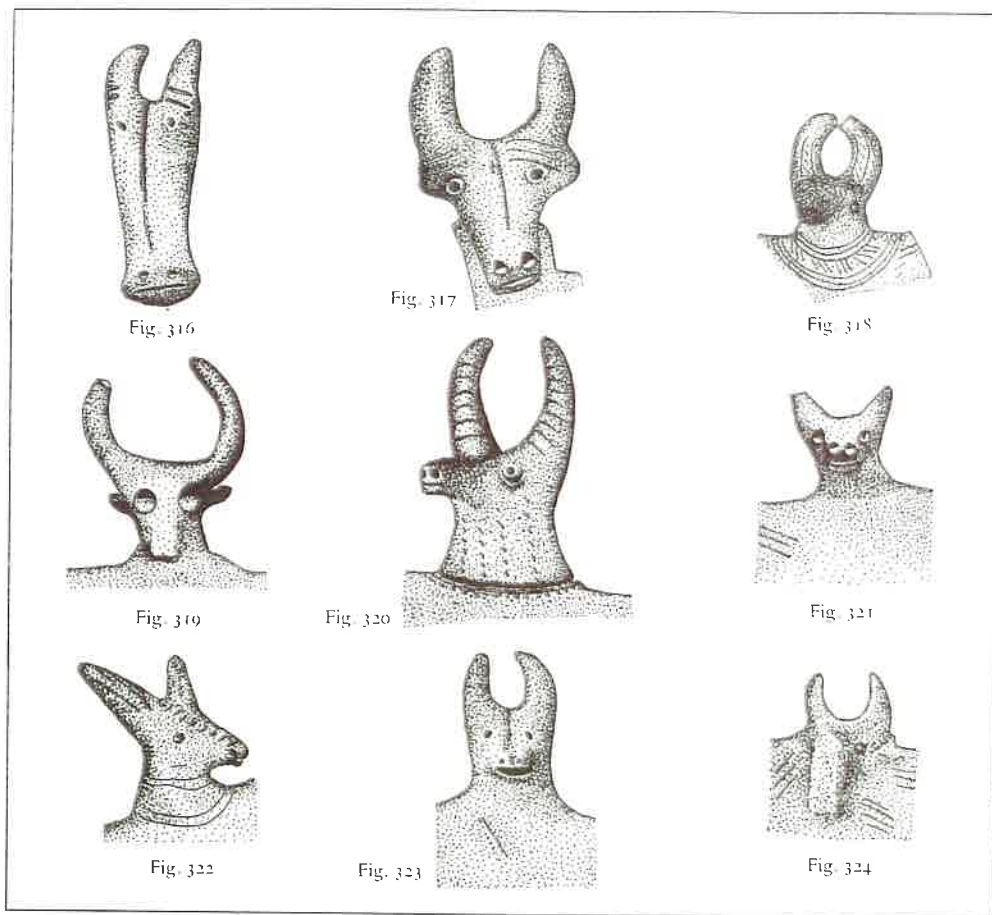


Fig. 314

Fig. 315



2 Cattle

Figs. 316-25 Bucranial terminals attached to Red Polished Ware vessels. Early Bronze Age. Figs. 316-24 all from Vounous.

Fig. 316 Tomb 160a, 17. Stewart and Stewart 1950, Pl. XCf.

Fig. 317 Tomb 160a, 17. Stewart and Stewart 1950, Pl. XCe.

Fig. 318 Tomb 117a, Peltenburg 1981, no. 311.

Fig. 319 Tomb 160a, 15. Stewart and Stewart 1950, Pl. XCIIId.

Fig. 320 Tomb 160b, 12. Stewart and Stewart 1950, Pl. XCIIb.

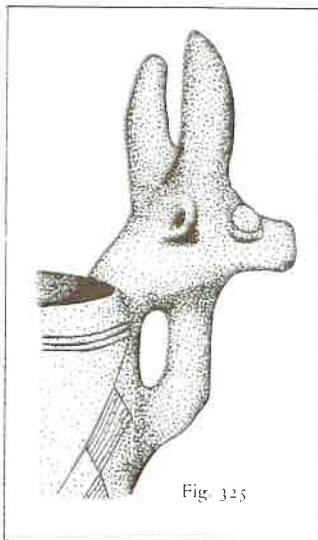
Fig. 321 Tomb 153, 1. Stewart and Stewart 1950, Pl. XCa.

Fig. 322 Tomb 81b, 9. Stewart and Stewart 1950, Pl. XCIIc.

Fig. 323 Tomb 153, 1. Stewart and Stewart 1950, Pl. XCb.

Fig. 324 Tomb 153, 10. Stewart and Stewart 1950, Pl. XCIIb.

Fig. 325 No provenance (Hadjiprodromou Collection, Famagusta). Karageorghis 1970, no. 66.



Pl. 222

Pl. 222 Tulip bowl with two bucrania on rim. The base of the bowl is pierced with a horizontal hole. Black-topped Red Polished Ware. Early Bronze Age. Diam. 16 cm (DM-BTRP-26).

Pl. 223 Protective bucrania on present-day Mediterranean buildings. In rural areas of islands such as Malta, Gozo and elsewhere, the horns, skulls, or modelled heads of bulls are placed high up on walls or roofs to protect the inhabitants from the Evil Eye and other hostile elements, a tradition that has persisted since the Neolithic period. (Photographs taken in Malta in 1983.)



bowls, a vulture and a standing bull, spread out round the rim at roughly equal intervals. It is as if the artist is making it absolutely clear that the bucranian elements are not merely stylized bulls, but are categorically distinct from the bull that is shown in a normal bovine posture. The only other object that makes this distinction is the famous 'sanctuary' scene from Vounous (see Fig. 494). There, Standing Bulls are shown in pens as part of the busy scene, and, in addition, up on the wall at one side, there is a triple Bucranial Terminal.

These two artefacts provide clear evidence that the Bucranial Terminals are not simply schematic simplifications of bulls, but instead are some special kind of 'displayed bulls' heads'. To understand the significance of this it is necessary, for a moment, to look beyond Cypriot shores.

From the earliest Neolithic times, the mainland cultures surrounding Cyprus have revered the bull. They admired its strength in more than one way, as Conrad (1959) has pointed out: 'In addition to the docile, plough-pulling steer they were familiar with two other types of bulls: the ferocious aurochs of the mountain country, and the semi-domesticated though dangerous stud bull. In each of these types they found something to admire, something to praise ... As the lord of battle, the strength and savagery of the wild mountain bull stood unchallenged. As the lord of reproduction, the stud bull was supreme. And, as lord of the plants, the great fertility of the steer was unquestioned.'

In his monumental work on *Zeus*, Cook (1914) records a Sumerian text written down at about the same time as the bull was entering Cypriot culture. The Sumerian bull-god's name was *Enlil*:

O Enlil, Councillor, who can grasp thy power?

Endowed with strength, lord of the harvest lands!

Created in the mountains, lord of the grain fields!

Ruler of great strength, father Enlil!

The powerful chief of the gods art thou,

The great creator and sustainer of life!

As a symbolic figure, the bull therefore represented *power* because of its size and wild savagery, *animal fertility* because of its impressive mating acts, and *crop fertility* because of the way the ox-plough opened the earth for the early farmers. Deified, this made the

bull the ideal protector of men, livestock and crops respectively. And it was this Great Protector that the new settlers from the north brought with them to Cyprus at the start of the Bronze Age. It is rather surprising that the local fallow deer stag was not immediately overwhelmed as a symbolic image by this awesome import, but he was so well entrenched on the island as part of the fauna, that he managed to hold out for at least the first part of the Bronze Age, sharing the honours with the taurine 'arriviste'.

The diagnostic feature of the bull in his role as Great Protector was his magnificent pair of horns. They became his sign, and to make this sign was to invoke his aid. The simple gesture of forming a horned hand, by extending the forefinger and the little finger while keeping the other digits bent, became widely used in the ancient world as a protection against the Evil Eye. Amulets of hands making this gesture have been worn for thousands of years. In a recent survey (Morris et al., 1979) we found that they are still in use in many countries today.

A more direct way of calling up the protective power of the bull spirit is to erect a pair of horns or a bull's head on top of a pole or a wall. Jutting defiantly into the sky, they symbolically challenge the evil forces that may be threatening the livestock or crops in the nearby fields, or the human inhabitants of the dwelling on which they are placed. Such practices have been operating from the Neolithic (see Mellaart, 1967) to the present day (see Pl. 223) around the lands of the Mediterranean region. Mellaart found the Neolithic town of Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia full of protective horn-signs: '... a single bucranium may be found in a house, whilst rows of bucrania are confined to shrines, where they may also be painted.' On the island of Malta, the ancient practice has survived the passage of time and is still strongly in evidence today. In rural districts everywhere one can find, high up on buildings and walls, protective bucrania, sometimes modelled or sculptured, but usually made of natural horns. The function is still the same, explicitly to protect the inhabitants from evil forces.

When these modern Maltese examples on p. 195 are compared with the ancient Cypriot Bucranial Terminals on p. 194, the similarity is striking. The amusing difference is that the Maltese are devout Christians, and there is a delightful irony in their recourse to the pro-

protective powers of the ancient bull-figure. The symbolic bull of ancient times eventually became institutionalized into a Horned God, complete with rituals of worship, temples and priests. It was this deity that the Christians opposed and converted into the Horned Devil, who then became the evil enemy. But his old protective powers refused to be extinguished, and modern Christians still call upon him for help whenever they make the *cornuta* hand-sign or erect a pair of horns on their farmhouse.

Returning now to ancient Cyprus, it seems almost certain that the Cypriots of the Early Bronze Age were using bulls' heads in a similar way, probably placing pairs of real horns on top of poles or dwellings as protective devices. The pottery bucrania adorning rims and shoulders of bowls and jugs were almost certainly ceramic echoes of this practice, and the triple bucrania shown in

model form (and discussed in a later chapter, see p. 284) were undoubtedly accurate portrayals of bulls' heads *in situ* on dwellings.

It is possible that these horns were thought to belong to a bull-god and that he was worshipped with all the trappings of a true religion. Archaeologists tend to refer to them as important elements 'in the religion of early Cyprus'. But we have no direct evidence that this was so and it may well be overstating the case. We know that the Sumerians had deified the bull at about the same time, and the mystical trappings of their beliefs may have been imported to Cyprus along with the cattle. Alternatively, the use of protective bucrania may have been little more than a simple superstition (as in present-day Malta), without any complex religious organization to accompany it. Until we have more extensive knowledge of Early Bronze Age settlements, we must keep an open mind,

2 Cattle

Pl. 224 *Standing bull. Hollow figurine with aperture at 'tail'. Four short stump-legs. Small loop-handle in the middle of the back. Pierced lugs form a pair of ears. Handmade White Painted Ware. Middle Bronze Age. Length 8.6 cm. Ht. 8.4 cm (DM-HWP-66). Old label on base indicates that this figure was formerly in the Cesnola Collection.*



2 Cattle

Pl. 225. *Standing bull. Hollow figurine with aperture on chest. Three short stumpy legs. Small loop-handle in the middle of the back. Handmade White Painted Ware. Middle Bronze Age. Length 14 cm (DM-HWP-64). Horn-tips restored.*



Pl. 225

Pl. 226. *Standing bull. Hollow figurine with aperture in middle of back. The aperture is connected to the tail by a loop handle. Four short legs. The small horns and general proportions of this figure suggest that it may be a cow, but as no udder is shown it is safer to see it as a variant of the many bull figures. Handmade White Painted Ware. Middle Bronze Age. Length 17.8 cm (DM-HWP-65). Old label on base indicates that this figure was formerly in the Cesnola Collection.*



Pl. 226



Pl. 227

2 Cattle

Pl. 227 Standing bull. Hollow figurine with aperture in the form of a cutaway-spouted 'tail'. Two lugs on either side of the tail-base. Loop handle in the middle of the back. Four short legs. A flat face with large, incised eyes and a nose formed from a pierced lug. Strongly inward curved horns and a pair of small, backward-turned ears. Handmade White Painted Ware, Middle Bronze Age. Length 15.6 cm (DM-HWP-63).



Pl. 228

Pl. 228 Standing bull. Hollow figurine with aperture emerging as a round-spouted neck from the back of the animal's head. The head itself is reduced to little more than a pair of horns. The spout is joined to the middle of the back by a large loop handle. Three short, stumpy-legs. A down-curved tail, pressed to the rear end of the body. Red-on-Black Ware. Middle Bronze Age. Length 18.4 cm (DM-ROB-12). Paintwork worn.

while freely admitting that the bull was an important image at this stage of Cypriot prehistory.

In the Middle Bronze Age there are still many small, cattle-shaped jugs to be seen, in White Painted Ware (Pls. 224-7) and Red-on-black Ware (pl. 228), but there is nothing particularly fierce or impressive about them, and the protective bucrania have already vanished from vessels.

With the arrival of the Late Bronze Age, however, the bull image reasserts itself. Dozens of vigorous Standing Bull figurines have been excavated, in both incised and painted Base Ring Ware (see Pls. 229, 231, and 232). Some have noses pierced for rings (Pls. 229a and 231), indicating that these are domestic bulls that can be led by man. This implies the fertility symbolism of the stud bull, rather than the protective symbolism of the all-powerful bull. It is significant that, during this epoch, the Base Ring Ware artists favoured two special images: *female humans* (see pp. 166-74) and *male cattle*. Men and cows were shunned. This preoccupation with the manufacture of many figures of women and bulls implies that they were, in a sense, a 'pair'—the symbols of female and male fertility respectively.

The Bucranial Terminal makes a comeback

during this Late Bronze period, appearing a bull-headed spout on a number of Base Ring jugs (see Pl. 230). At least nine of these have been published and, judging by the variety of shape and detail, they were not the idiosyncratic work of a single artist, but constituted a standard theme throughout the Base Ring phase of Cypriot pottery. Towards the end of the Late Bronze Age bronze bulls were also made in some numbers, and the animal was clearly a dominant theme again in this period, so much so that gold earrings were worn in the shape of bulls' heads (see Pl. 233a). These are better known from Enkomi and Kition. This bull earring tradition lasted well into the Cypriot Classical period (see Pl. 233b).

In the Iron Age the bull image survives, appearing and reappearing as Bucranial Terminals on ring vessels, and on Bichrome Ware jars (with horns acting as handles). The bull was also moderately popular as an element in the free-field paintings of this period. Karageorghis and des Gagniers (1977) traced twenty-five examples. But perhaps the most attractive form of bull image is the bull found on a series of hanging wall brackets (see Pl. 234) which re-create the Early Bronze Age mood of a protective bull's head fixed high upon a building.

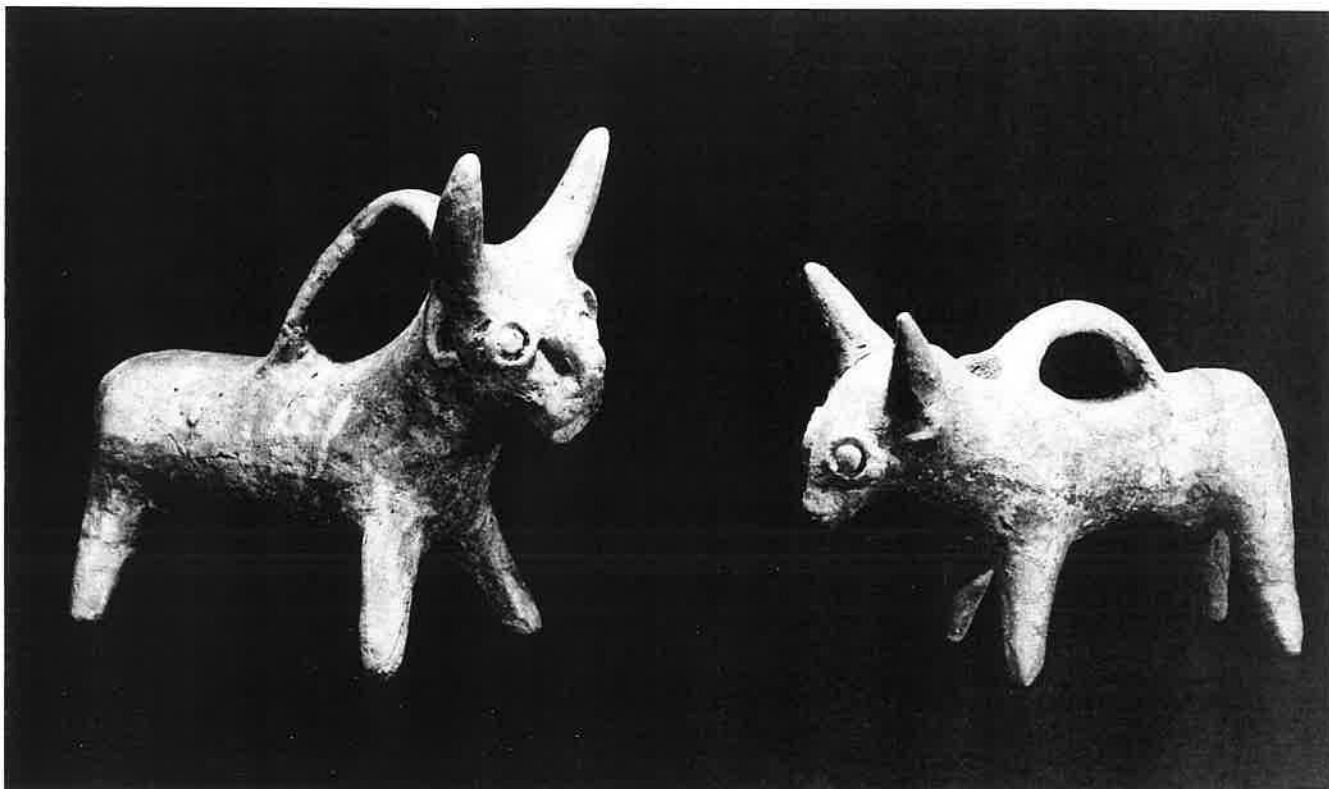
2 Cattle

Pl. 229

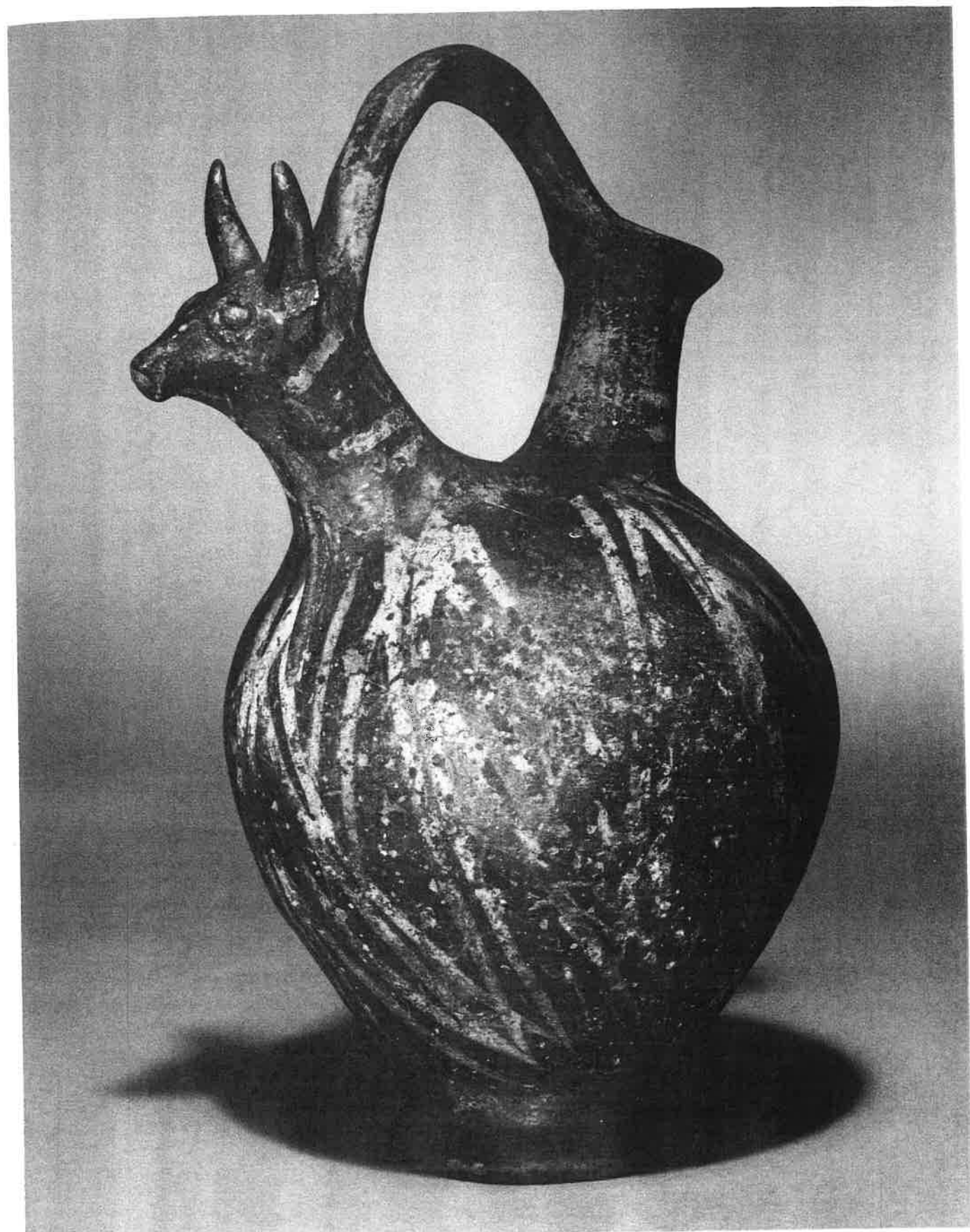
a(left) Standing bull. Hollow figurine with aperture on back of neck. Loop handle from rear of aperture to middle of back. A second aperture forms the mouth of the animal. A large nose-ring is indicated on top of the snout. Traces of painted decoration. Base Ring Ware. Late Bronze Age. Length 13.2 cm (DM-BR-47).

b(right) Same description, but without the nose-ring. Length 10.8 cm (DM-BR-45).

Pl. 230 Jug with ring-base and round spout, the latter connected by loop-handle to a bucranal side-spout. Painted decoration. Base Ring Ware. Late Bronze Age. Ht. 20.8 cm (DM-BR-21).



Pl. 229



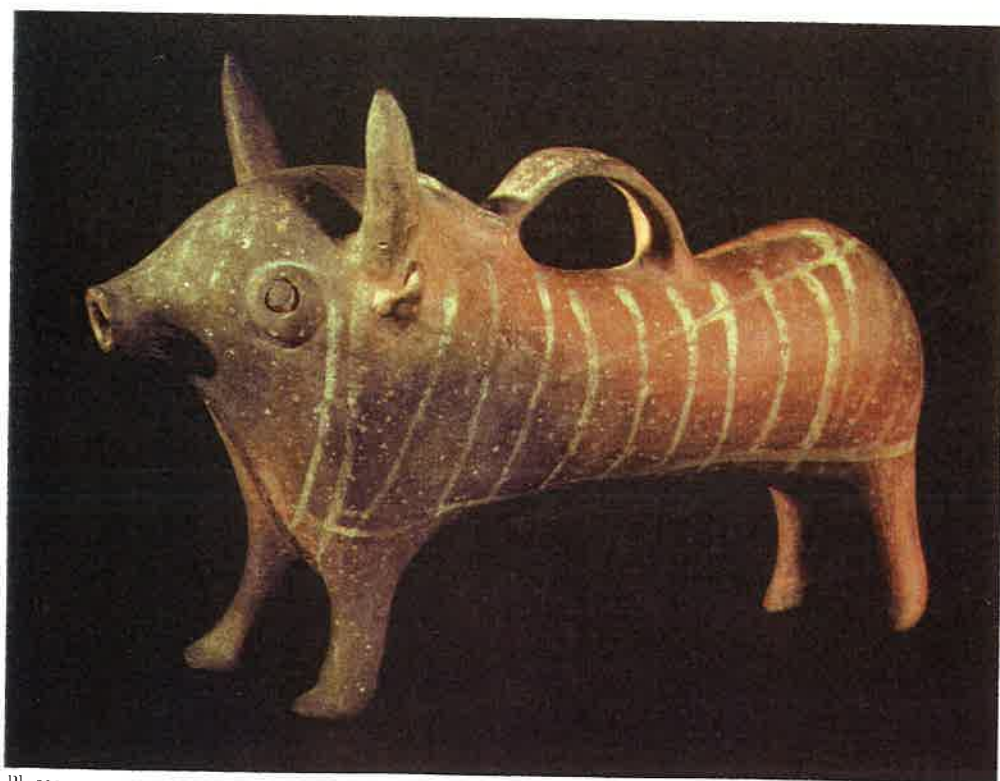
2 Cattle

Pl. 231 Standing bull. Hollow figurine with aperture on back of neck. Loop handle from rear of aperture to middle of back. A second aperture forms the mouth of the animal. A large nose-ring is indicated on top of the snout. One ear is shown open and one half-shut. Painted decoration. Base Ring Ware. Late Bronze Age. Length 13.1 cm. Ht. 13.6 cm (DM-BR-46).



Pl. 231

Pl. 232 Standing bull. Hollow figurine with aperture on back of neck. Loop handle from rear of aperture to middle of back. Rather pointed nose. Painted decoration is unusually well preserved. Base Ring Ware. Late Bronze Age. Length 17.7 cm. Ht. 12 cm (DM-BR-44).



Pl. 232



Pl. 233

2 Cattle

Pl. 233

a(above) Pair of bull's-head earrings. Decoration includes nostrils, eyes and ears. There are two apertures on top of the head, the loops of wire emerging from them symbolically representing the horns.

On the forehead is a distinctive cross-within-a-circle motif. Gold. Late Bronze Age. Head lengths 1.8 cm (DM-ME-49). Cf. Murray 1900, Pl. X, nos. 234 and 403, which show identical forehead motifs.

b(below) Pair of bull's-head earrings. Decoration includes pair of short horns, forelock and inset blue eyes. Gold. Cypro-Classical Period. Head length 1.4 cm (DM-ME-50). Cf. Pierides 1971, Pl. XXI, nos. 8 and 9.



Pl. 234

Pl. 234 Hanging bracket lamp-stand with bull's head decoration in relief. The bull's eyes with eyelashes. The lower part of the bracket is missing. Bichrome Ware. Iron Age. Ht. (of surviving section) 17.1 cm (DM-BI-104). Cf. Karageorghis 1969, Fig. 53.