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Is it goddess or bear? The role of Çatalhöyük animal seals in Neolithic symbolism

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ABSTRACT – *Two examples of stamp seals discovered in the 2003 and 2005 seasons, one depicting a leopard, the other, a bear (both unusual with respect to their uncommon amulet forms reminiscent of figurines, and their recurrence in wall reliefs) provide a key role in understanding the symbolism of Çatalhöyük, along with the complex relations between some distinctive animal groups and their ritual role in the settlement. They demonstrate that the depiction of animals seems not to be confined only to the walls at Çatalhöyük, but also appear as sacred symbols of the community on seals. The stamp in the form of a bear is another unique form that is also echoed in the large wall reliefs uncovered by Mellaart, which compels us to change some preconceptions about the ritual role of these wall reliefs, which have been interpreted as mother goddess images.*

IZVLEČEK – *Ključno vlogo pri razumevanju simbolike Çatalhöyüka predstavljata dva pečatnika-žiga, odkrita v sezonah raziskav 2003 in 2005. Umeščena sta v kompleks povezav med nekaterimi izrazitimi skupinami živali in njihovo vlogo v naselbini. Na enem pečatniku je upodobljen leopard, na drugem medved (oba sta nenavadna zaradi njunih neobičajnih amuletnih oblik, ki spominjajo na figure in njunega pojavljanja na stenskih reliefih). Pečatnika kažeta, da upodobitve živali niso bile omejene le na hišne stene Çatalhöyüka, temveč se kot sveti simboli skupnosti pojavljajo tudi na pečatnikih. Pečatnik v obliki medveda je druga izjemna oblika, ki se ponavlja tudi na velikih stenskih reliefih, ki jih je odkril Mellaart. Upodobitvi nas silita, da spremenimo nekatere predsodke glede ritualne vloge teh stenskih reliefov, ki so jih sicer interpretirali kot podobe boginje matere.*

KEY WORDS – *Anatolia; Neolithic Period; Çatalhöyük; stamp seals; wall reliefs; animal representations; fauna; symbolism*

The unusual examples of stamp seals, one depicting a leopard, and the other, a bear (both unusual with respect to their uncommon amulet forms reminiscent of figurines, and their repetition in wall reliefs) unearthed in the 2003 and 2005 seasons, seem to provide a key role in deciphering some ill-defined figures explained as 'mother goddesses' and give the seals a new role in the symbolism of Çatalhöyük, along with the complex relations between some distinctive animal groups and their ritual role in the settlement. They demonstrate that the animal representation seems to be reserved not only to the walls at Çatalhöyük, but also appeared as sacred symbols of the community on seals. This study aims to interpret these extraordinary seals within the context of wall paintings and reliefs and recent faunal data.

The Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük in Central Anatolia (Konya) was first discovered in the late 1950s, and excavated by James Mellaart in four excavation seasons between 1961 and 1965. The site rapidly became famous internationally due to the large size and dense occupation of the settlement, as well as the spectacular wall paintings and other objects uncovered inside the houses. The stamp seals were one of the unique assemblages found at Çatalhöyük. They were common artefacts that had been widely used or manufactured in every part of the settlements and probably most households of the Early Neolithic settlement of Çatalhöyük, dated to between the early 8th millenium and the 2nd quarter of the 7th millennium BC The earliest examples of prehistoric stamp seals – or pintadera (painted seals) to

use a New World archaeological term – have been found at the Neolithic site of Çatalhöyük. They are made of fired clay, and with their variety of motifs and forms comprise a significant and distinctive group among Neolithic stamp seals dating between 8000 and 5000 BC found at various settlements in the Near East. A total of 48 such seals have been found at Çatalhöyük, the majority during the excavations under Mellaart, and others during the most recent excavations. The latest examples were found in Level II, and the oldest in Level VII. The classification of the seals suggests that they might have been used on various different surfaces, including textiles, leather, clay, and loaves of bread, or even as tattoo. Actually, no seal impressions on clay have been found, neither at Çatalhöyük nor any other Neolithic settlements in Anatolia (*Türkcan 2006*).

The stamps in the form of hands and distinctive animals (leopard, bear) are also reflected in wall paintings and reliefs, as well as ones with complex abstract designs. Moreover, two unusual examples (both with respect to their unusual amulet forms reminiscent of figurines, and their recurrence in wall reliefs) discovered during the 2003 and subsequent excavation seasons demonstrate that the stamps played an important part in the symbolism of Çatalhöyük. The leopard is the most frequently represented animal form in wall reliefs at the site, but this is the first example of this motif on a stamp. Another stamp, in the form of a bear, discovered in 2005, is echoed in the large wall reliefs uncovered by Mellaart. Therefore, there is fresh evidence, which changes some preconceptions about the ritual role of these wall reliefs, hitherto interpreted as 'mother goddess' images.

It is a fact that the stamp's capacity of reproduction, which can be duplicated repeatedly on any convenient surface, seems to have transformed itself into an important ritual device. This can also be related to the transition of memory into mobile art objects on upper levels. As Ian Hodder remarked (*2006. 195*) that the house-based control of memory seen in the upper levels of the site, and symbols that had earlier only been used within the houses come to be used in media that can be exchanged between houses, so as the stamp seals take the wall designs into a new mobile context. Furthermore, they may be objects identitifying individuals of high rank in the society or symbols of some clans who were authorized to organize the religious and economic life of the settlers. However, even if they have any implications for status organization, these naturally remain obscure on the current evidence. The seals show that these cult images were also transferred to portable images like seals that can also duplicate the same images like bear, panther, hands, paws and floral forms on relevant surfaces.

The leopard, its presence in representations and Catalhöyük fauna

The earliest leopard representations in Anatolia are those comprising the main subject of representation among the Çatalhöyük reliefs. Therefore, it is also a renowned animal figure in Neolithic Çatalhöyük. Anatolian Leopards (*Panthera pardus tulliana*) are known to have lived in Central Anatolia and Southern Taurus Mountains until recent times (*Gürpınar 2000; Yalçın 2006*)[1]. The earliest leopard representation was found in one of the deep galleries of Chauvet Cave in southern France and dated to the Aurignacian period, to approximately 33 000 BP (*White 2003.79*). The earliest leopard scenes in the Neolithic Near East were first recovered on carved stone 'stelai' of probably rounded 'cult buildings' in Tell Abr in Northern Syria and dated to the PPNA period (*Yartah 2005.4–5*).

The leopard seal is (Fig. 1) the first of this type not only from Çatalhöyük, but also throughout the Neolithic period in Anatolia (*Türkcan 2003*). Early traces of leopards in Çatalhöyük are not first represented themselves, but only by their spotted skin, complete with tail, worn by many of the humans in Level V. In Level III, there are also humans wearing spotted skins. As understood, leopard skin garments, are very common in the paintings (*Russel and Meece 2006.215*). Leopards themselves occur first in a shrine for two levels, building VII.44 and VI.44., a so-called leopard shrine (Fig.2). It has a pair of facing leopards on the north wall and a single leopard on the east wall. There is another shrine directly overlying it (E.VI.44) with another pair of facing spotted leopards (*Mellaart 1964e.42. fig 5*). One

1 The Anatolian leopard (*Panthera pardus tulliana*) is a subspecies of leopard native to Anatolia. It is unknown whether any of these leopards still exist in the wild.. These animals once prowled the forest and hill regions of Aegean, West Mediterranean, East Mediterranean, and East Anatolia. Adults grow 200–250 centimeters long and may weigh up to 90 kg; their lifespan is approximately 20. The last official sighting of the Anatolian leopard was in 1974. The animal was killed after an attack on a woman in Bagozu village, 5 km from Beypazari in Ankara.

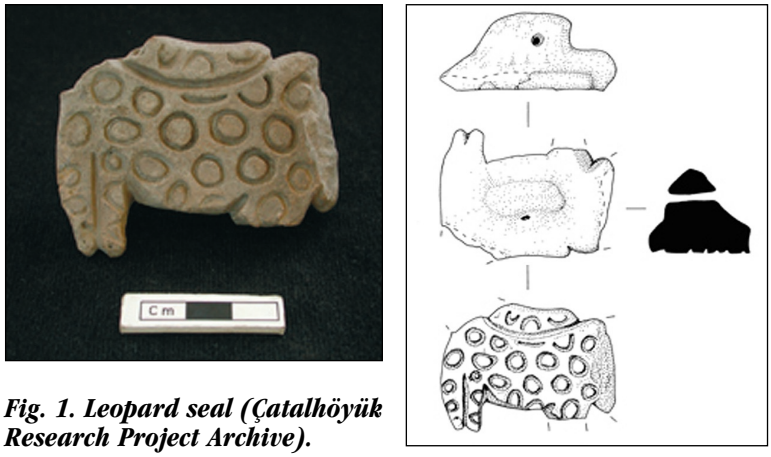

Fig. 1. Leopard seal (Çatalhöyük Research Project Archive).

more pair is found tail to tail in the northwest corner of building VI.80 (*Mellaart 1967.175–6*).

On the other hand, any leopard or any associated feline clay figurine could not be recognised among the animal figurines that occur almost entirely in Levels VI and VII. In neither Mellaart's excavations nor ongoing excavations could feline or leopard figurines be detected. Actually, the leopards are only represented by humans or deities on large sculptural pieces, as especially seen on woman seated on large felids, much probably leopards or male representaions riding sitting, riding leopards. As in Mellaart's classification (*1967.203–204, Pl. 73–76, 86, Fig. 49, Pl. 67, 68, fig. 50, Pl. 87*), there are 7 statuettes in the form of pairs of 'goddessses' or deities riding leopards seated with two leopard cubs, or wearing a leopard blouse. There are also male or 'gods' as stone carved statuettes, such as a boy riding a leopard and a seated god with a leopard cap. Among them, one piece from Level II is the most renowned: an enthroned goddess giving birth between two leopards.

On the other hand, the leopard was frequently the only animal that appeared in representations, but was totally absent from the faunal remains until its discovery in 2005. Therefore, this sort of absence in the fauna also seems worth consideration. This is particularly striking, since there are so many representations of leopards, that it was unthinkable to kill leopards. According to Russel and Meece (*2006.223*), if whole skins of leopards were brought back to the site, at least the feet should have been recovered so far, or if a skin had been processed into clothing, one or more bones should have been left on site. According to the paintings in Level V and level III., people at least wore leopard skins and thus used them in their daily life. Moreover, two figurines on the wall paintings from levels II and IV are wearing spotted garments that may well be leopard skins (*Mellaart 1967.Fig. 51, Pl. 87*).

Although leopards appear repeatedly in Çatalhöyük art, part of a specimen was only finally found in 2006:

Fig. 2. Leopard reliefs (*Mellaart 1967.Pl. VI*)

a claw that was probably pierced to be worn as a necklace or bracelet found in the burial of a woman holding a plastered human skull to her chest and face in 2004 (*Hodder 2006.260*). Therefore the special context of the find make it more interesting than other similar finds in as much as it is unique material. So the discovery of at least one bone in a remarkable context seems to confirm that there were leopards in the vicinity and were already familiar to the Çatalhöyük community at that time. Moreover, finding only one piece among 24 000 pieces classified to their taxon is also striking, suggesting that it was somehow a rare relic in the community.

The bear, its presence in representations and Catalhöyük fauna

In the search for bear representations in Çatalhöyük, only one could be identified, in a wall painting from Level V. However, apart from the paintings, various splayed figure types are important, whether they are bear or human representations, in a discussion of bear imagery and a probable bear cult in the settlement. Aside from the indeterminate quadruped heads, all splayed figure types are central to the discussion (Fig. 3). They comprise a wide representation group, which Mellaart believed (*1963d.61–67*) represented stylized human females and hence the 'mother goddess', with the outstretched and sometimes upturned limbs as an indication of the birth position. They were found in several buildings (9 buildings: VIA.50, VI.B 12, VI.31, VII 31, VII.1, VI.A.8, VIB.8, VII.A.8, VII.45, VII.23, VI.A.10, VI.B.10 'shrines'), with 15 representations, of which 3 are shown as twin 'goddesss' representations (*Mellaart 1967*). However, Ian Hodder (*1987.45*) was the first to question the real identity of the splayed figures as 'mother goddess' representations, and assumed that associations of humanoid reliefs are too ambigious to be regarded as women, much less as goddesses. Russel and Meece (*2006.215*) also suggested that the splayed figures are generally animals, because none of them have any indication of gender, in contrast to some figurines and painted figurines. They also add that the upturned legs create a position physically impossible for humans, and that the placement of the limbs suggests bears or some other quadrupeds. A similar relief figurine, but with a tail, was also found on limestone pillars at Göbekli tepe, and is interpreted as an animal (*Hauptmann 1999.52, Fig. 27; Schmidt 2005; Russel and Meece 2006.215*), probably a large lizard (*Varan varanus*) still found in the area.

At Çatalhöyük, the heads and usually the hands and sometimes feet of these splayed figurines were knocked off during the abandonment of the related spaces. One of them has faint indications of rounded animal ears. For Mellaart, it was merely a horned hairstyle (*1964.50*). Another has its feet outlined in red, which Mellaart compares to the similar treatment of the feet and tails of the leopard reliefs (*1964.45*). Russel and Meece (*2006.216*) assume that all of these features raise the strong possibility that the reliefs portray animals. The rounded heads suggest a carnivore, perhaps leopard and bear. On the other hand, some of these figures have a distinctly marked navel. This feature suggests that they were intended to be antropomorphic or theriantropic (human-bear?). Whether humanoid or animal, they recur as an important, reasonably standardized motif (*Russel and Meece 2006.216*). A possible human-bear therianthropic image somehow recalls a vision of shaman figures on the walls.

Fig. 3. Splayed figure in shrine VII. 23 (*Mellaart 1967.Pl. VII*).

As already mentioned, the heads and hands of the splayed plaster examples are always missing, so it was not easy to say whether the figures were humans or animals. It raises new

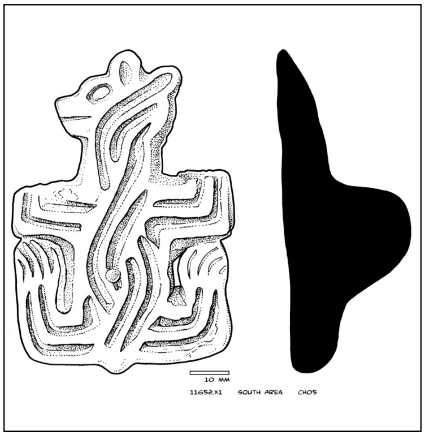

Fig. 4. Bear seal (11652.x1/Çatalhöyük Research Project Archive).

questions as much as it may illustrate existing arguments regarding the identification of the splayed figures on the walls. But now the bear stamp seal provides a key. Actually, the head and the hind paws of the seal are clearly recognizable as bear and identical with the splayed relief figures on the walls (Fig. 4). An almost complete clay bear (11 652.X1) from South Area, Building 44 & 56 (*Türkcan 2005*). Despite minor damage to the forelegs, it is possible to reconstruct the overall form. They seem to have been intentionally broken at the same point. The small tail is also emphasized between the legs. The overall form, the head, small tail and other features (the head and paws) all show that it is a bear representation. One tiny pebble is recognized as stuck just in the middle of the belly part. It makes a contrast with the flat and smooth surface of the seals face. It is also noteworthy that a similar spot is also emphasized on the bellies of upraised arm reliefs (in the spaces of VI.1, VII.31, VI.8, and VII.45. VI.B.8, VI.B.10; see *Mellaart 1967*).

Another aspect is that the proportions in which bears are represented symbolically differ from those in the faunal remains. The differences or contrasts between the representations and the taxa are interesting. Up to now, only one bear paw has been identified. This is an articulated bear paw with traces of plaster between the toes where it was found in the fill of space 159, Bldg 24, Level VII. This is also the antechamber of Mellaart's building VII.10 (*Russel and Meece 2006.221*) The plaster probably indicates that the paw or a hide to which it was attached was once part of an architectural feature (*Russel and Meece 2006.221*). This actual find of a specially treated bear paw also reinforces the idea that it could also be a fragment or part of a splayed figure on the walls, as we think that the heads and hands of all the plaster relief examples were always removed. All paws are empty and the head parts have been defaced. One is described clearly by Mellaart (*1967.114*):

"*VII.3I was one of the best preserved buildings on the site, even though it had lost the plaster of its entire north and more than half of the cast wall. It had been abandoned and filled in after its reliefs had been defaced... The first composition consisted of the familiar goddess-figure modeled in bold relief, the hands and feet of which appear to have been made separately and inserted into now empty sockets.*"

Moreover, the study which I made of the stamp seal assemblage in 1997, of a hand-shaped seal, with larger and bold digits in oval form, was already singled out (Level IV, Area E1; *Mellaart 1964.Fig. 41.4*), as it was considered as likely to be a bear paw as a human hand (*Türkcan 2005.Seal No. 19*). In earlier research, I was hesitant to say that it was a bear paw, but in the light of our bear representation, it can be called as a bear paw on the light of bear paw (Fig. 5).

The context of the bear stamp is also noteworthy regarding its deposition. It was at the center of the building deposit, equidistant from the walls and the northern edge of the hearth. It was placed face down, with head on house fill (Space 54) that was probably a backfill below the upper phase of the overlying building (Fig. 6). So the seal does not seem to have been deposited accidentally, but seems to have been left as a votive object before the abandonment of the space (space 54). It is clearly identi-

Fig. 5. Paw-shaped stamp seal (Ali Türkcan Archive).

fied in the report of Roddy Regan (*2005*), who excavated in Building 44 on the Summit Area:

"*If seen in this light the impressive clay stamp unearthed in 'room-fill' deposit (11652) may also mark a transitional event within the construction of Building 44. In this case the end of backfilling and the beginning of constructional levelling. Of course, it could be argued that the stamp was just dumped as part of the backfilling process, its neatly clipped hands/paws suggesting that the object itself had undergone a transition. The stamp, however, was recovered from a deposit of relatively few finds and appeared to have been 'placed' face downwards, hinting at more than casual loss.*"

Fig. 6. In-situ position of bear seal (11 652.x1) on house fill of Building 44. on-line http://www.catalhoyuk. com/archive_reports/2005/ar05_14.html (Fig. 53).

Discussion

Neolithic studies are shifting away from rigid artefact analysis to an understanding of beliefs and rituals during one decade. Animal representations (wall paintings, figurines, bucranium projections, reliefs and rock paintings right coming through Upper Paleolithic tradition) and these animal groups' taxonomy on faunal evidence are becoming important in Neolithic Studies. The multiciplity of human-animal relations, their symbolism and association with the social domain, ritualised practises and classification systems have hardly been tackled in archaeological literature. They are predominantly understood within the framework of economic efficiency and the domestication process. However, anthropological and historical accounts point to the centrality of the cultural and social importance of animals for Neolithic communities, as well as for traditional herders.

The evidence from the stamp seals and probable splayed figures testify that the bear cult was another important ritual figure, as well as the leopard and bull cults throughout many levels among the Çatalhöyük Neolithic community. On the other hand, the cult of the bear was already a deeply rooted belief from the Middle Paleolithic (and until recent peoples in the Arctic). The first evidence of a bear cult is observed at a Middle Paleolithic site at Régourdou. Régourdou constitutes a case for some kind of bear-centered animal cult some 60 000–70 000 years ago (*Hayden 2005*). Ethnographically, bear cults are rather common in cold climates, from the Northern Coast to Finland and Siberia. Lajoux (*2002*) and Bonifay (*2002*) have drawn attention to the frequent importance of the bear as a symbol of death and resurrection (because of its hibernation and reemergence in spring), making it apt for rituals. These examples can also be multiplied in shamanic cultures in Central Asian and Native American cultures. Many large bear craniums, teeth were frequently employed as personal ornaments. In the Gravettian period, there is also a carved bear's head in Dolni Vestonice, and bear representations in Chauvet Cave (*White 2003*).

On the other hand, in comparisons of engravings and faunal taxa from various sites (La Vache, Limouil, La Madeleine) have also yeilded many representions of many carnivores such as fox, wolf, lion but no bear. It is even more striking to see the differences between the species represented and animal remains. In an analysis of engraved/painted subjects on the walls of rock shelters and caves, Gilles and Brigitte Delluc (*1991*) have tallied the different animal groups; bears are represented in the Aurignacian period, but not in any Gravettian deposits.

As stated before, animals were integral components of human existence in many more domains than today. Images of animals within Paleolithic cave paintings, for instance, may have functioned to cue the recall of ecological knowledge (*Mithen 1998.98*). Actually, depictions of what are probably supernatural beings (half-human, half-animal representations) provide some of the most intriguing images of prehistoric art. The earliest representations can be seen in examples like the half-man, half-lion Hohlenstein high carving dating to *c.* 33 000 years ago (*White 2003*), and the contemporary half-human, half-bison figures found in Chauvet Cave (*Chauvet et al. 1996*) and the famous 'Sorcerer' figure in Les Trois Fréres

cave (*White 2003*), which is dated to the Magdaleneian period. They are important works that can be regarded as supernatural/mythical images of those kinds of hybrid representation. The examples can also be multiplied from the Upper Paleolithic to the Neolithic in the Near East. Actually, these images also seem to belong to the intertwined worlds of animal and human beings as reflected in the shamanic tradition of dedicating or connecting the soul to a predator such as wolf, bear, vulture and etc. According to Ingolds (*2000.121*), depictions of animals and humans in traditional societies are not representations of everyday activities, but rather of another plane of reality, where animals, ancestral beings, and humans relate to each other socially.

Verhoeven (*2002*) assumes that humans' relations with animals, especially wild animals, seem to be the key concept of the symbolic representations of PPNB Upper Mesopotamia. The absence of many carnivores which are otherwise dominant representational figures from the faunal taxonomy are also similar in the Upper Mesopotamian PPNB figurine assemblage. Among the many clay animal figurines from Çayönü and Nevali Çori sites, no carnivore representations that form the main repertoire of reliefs on pillars and sculptures along with humans were found. Among the many clay animal figurines from the Çayönü and Nevali Çori sites, no carnivores that composed the main repertoire of reliefs on pillars and sculptures along with humans have been found. According to some sources, (*Wengrow 2003; Morsch 2002*) over 70 % have been identified as horned quadropeds of some sort; the remaining minority are generally identified as mammalian forms. However, any felines, reptiles, or birds which would have been common feature in the landscape at that time appear to be almost or totally absent in the figurine assemblage. These wild specimens seem to be reserved for monumental reliefs on monolithic T-pillars and stone sculptures found in 'Cult Buildings'. Wengrow (*2003*) also assumes that the major presence of carnivores and birds reinforces at these sites a sense of a symbolic lanscape alien to the domestic household. In a way, in the light of the Nevali Çori and Göbekli tepe examples, a sense of wild landscape symbolism consisting of large carnivores and birds seems to be reserved to monumental reliefs in so-called monumental 'Cult Buildings', not in any house or house-based context (*Wengrrow 2003; Schmidt 2006*). In contrast, the clay animal figurines from Nevali Çori represent a different symbolic sphere seemingly reserved to the domestic area and more a part of daily rituals.

The absence of leopards and bears and other carnivores in the figurine assemblage at Çatalhöyük also seems worth considering. The predators and birds are never identified in the figurine assemblage, despite their dominant representations on monumental reliefs. Rather, domesticated species or bull figurines are the dominant figure in this assemblage, as well as in the Nevali Çori and Çayönü figurine assemblages. The different divisions and proportions of represented groups are noteworthy. In a way, in the light of the Upper Mesopotamian PPNB evidence from Nevali Çori and Göbekli tepe, a sense of wild landscape symbolism consisting of large carnivores and birds seem to be reserved to monumental reliefs in 'Cult Buildings'. In contrast, figurines of domestic animals or at least herbivores from Nevali Çori represent a different symbolic sphere seemingly reserved to the domestic area and more a part of daily rituals. Similarly, at Catalhoyuk no carnivore or wild animals were seen on any clay figurines except the stamp seals. So, it can be assumed that the symbolic landscape represented by wild animals on portable objects seems to have been reserved to the animal seals. Although the reason is obscure, it can be assumed that the representation of predators that are only seen in reliefs can also be related to the functions of the figurines, or to taboos that can not be deciphered.

Another absence has been detected in the bear's (<%1) and leopards' (? %) share in the taxonomy of faunal remains. Whereas the proportions betwen the representations and those animals' proportions in the taxonomy are not symmetrical. The proportions in which animals are represented symbolically differ from those in the faunal remains just as much as the differences between the media are assymetrical, and therefore interesting. These differences tend to suggest there could be a taboo about either bringing those animals onto the site, or hunting (*Hodder 2006.261*). Viewed from this perspective, the actual paw remains of a bear and the perforated leopard claw pendant testify that they are the result of special treatment, as well as to their special role in the community.

Another phenomenon that has been attested on splayed figures is the removal of the paws and head parts. It might be, therefore, as a result of an iconoclastic custom, as already stressed by Mellaart in particular cases (*1966.188*):

"*Were the heads destroyed intentionally before the paintings were covered with white plaster, like the*

deer's head in the level V shrine, the leopard's in Shrine VI. (0 or the heads, arms and legs of goddess reliefs in the shrines of level VII? The habit of religious iconoclasm at Çatalhöyük is well attested."

The bear seal's broken paws are likely to have shared the same fate and seem to be related to the same custom as seen on the splayed figurines, the paws of which are also broken. Despite the leopard seal's front part and some part of the tail being broken, its abraded condition and unclear context make it harder to speculate on whether it was broken deliberately.

The repetition or dominance of the associated representations is another phenomenon. The repetition of the same images between levels VI and VII in several buildings show that the splayed figures may have functioned as important deities. Besides that, the absence of leopard and bear figures in wall paintings also reinforces their different role in the ritual sphere of the community, as well as the redundancy of the same iconography of representations through many levels of habitation in the Çatalhöyük community. As Russel and Meece (*2006.229*) have stressed, the leopard and splayed figures display an episodic character and remain visible for longer periods. Thus they may also be tied to changing myths.

Conclusions

The variable representation of bear and leopard on portable and reproductive media as seen on seals, reliefs and wall paintings seems to reinforce our argument that these are representations of mythical animals, along with paintings, reliefs and pendants and stone statuettes. With the possible decipherment of splayed figures as bear, the bear cult or a similar cult centered on bear was also an important ritual figure as well as the leopard and bull cult throughout many levels among Çatalhöyük Neolithic community.

As a result of evidence based on an analysis of faunal evidence and contextual evidence, as well as an iconographic comparison, it can be summarized as below:

❶ According to Russel and Meece (*2006.215*), they are generally animals, because none of them have any indication of any gender, in contrast to some figurines and painted figurines. Moreover, the upturned legs make a position physically impossible for humans. The placement of the limbs rather suggests bears or some other some quadruped animals. Moreover, one figure has faint indications of rounded animal ears. All of these features raise the strong possibility that the splayed reliefs portray animals. The rounded heads also suggest a carnivore, bear and perhaps even leopard. As they are compared to the seal's upturned legs and the more important head part, it is a point of fact that the splayed figures are generally bear.

Fig. 7. 'Master of the animals', limestone figurine of a woman on a leopard (*Mellaart 1967.Pl. 75*)

❷ This actual find of a specially treated bear paw also reinforces the idea that it could also be a fragment as an lively apparatus on moulded relief of splayed figures on the walls as we think that heads and hands of the plaster relief examples were always cut off. At Çatalhöyük, the heads and usually the hands and sometimes the feet of these splayed figurines were knocked off upon the abandonment of the related spaces.

❸ As stated already, the bear seal's possible deposition as a votive object before the abandonment of the space fill (of space 54) (*Regan 2005*) suggests that the bear image had already been a valuable amulet before its deposition in the fill. Their forepaws are also broken, and this does not seem to be a post-depositional case. It seems instead to have been deliberately broken, as observed on the broken legs and forepaws of splayed figures at the end of the life cycle of the buildings where they were buried. Therefore, sharing similar application to what happened to the splayed figures during the abandonment of the buildings seems in a way to be identical with the same broken parts of the bear seal. Although the leopard seal is broken in the front part,

including head and tail at the back, the abraded condition of the broken parts and the unclear context compel me to think it was probably discarded where it was deposited. On the other hand, the leopard reliefs seem to have been kept as they were in the shrines.

As far as depicting leopards in relief at Çatalhöyük is considered, it should not be surprising that the bear image is already growing clear. However, some hints of human features, like the concentric belly on one splayed figure, is still intriguing and is probably an indication of a pregnant belly; bear features are sufficiently dominant as to suggest it was once an animal deity. So it is probable that the splayed reliefs with upraised arms and legs do not seem to be antropomorphic 'goddesses' as Mellaart formulated (*1967*), but more probably bears or somewhat hybrid creatures in bear form.

Combining all the evidence, the splayed figures are much more likely to represent an animal deity, finally indicating that the splayed figures are images of bear, rather than humanoid goddess figurines, an important deity, like the leopard and bull. In a way, the combination of three representation groups (bull, bear and leopard) through many levels of habitation together in the same buildings ('shrines') suggests that they might have acted as a 'Holy Triad' in Çatalhöyük symbolism.

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