

Silver Zebu Bull

2nd Millennium BC,

Hittite

Silver

H: 11.4 cm

A rare hollow-cast silver bull with humped shoulders and large curved horns. Incised lines mark the eyes, nose, and thick shaggy coat on the midriff and dewlap. The underside is open. The rump supports a circular loop, topped with two engraved rivets, which may have supported a small offering dish (now missing). There are five stickers with inventory numbers on the custom black marble base, including one from Mathias Komor.

A ring-shaped standard with a deer and two bulls, found among the grave goods at Alacahöyük.

The Bronze Age Hattian people in central Anatolia, like many ancient civilisations, viewed the bull as a sacred animal. Many figures and vessels produced throughout this region in the 2nd and 1st millennia are in the form of zebu or other long-horned cattle. Long-horned bulls feature in the bronze standards and statues found in the 2nd millennium BC tombs at Alacahöyük in Alaca, modern-day Turkey. Cattle

skulls and foot bones were also found arranged on the tops of the tombs. Possible reasons for their prominent placement include their association with the Storm God, their theorised role in pulling wagons, and their position as an elite status symbol. It therefore seems fitting that this silver zebu could have held a dish for use in ritual offerings. Sacred bulls were later adopted into the sun discs produced by the Hittites who took over this region from the Hattians in around 1700 BC. The bull was also associated with the ancient mother-goddess Cybele, and therefore with fertility and virility.

Exhibitions

Exotic Art from Ancient and Primitive Civilizations: Collection of Jay C. Leff, Carnegie Institute, Pittsburgh, 1959-60

Literature:

Exotic Art from Ancient and Primitive Civilizations: Collection of Jay C. Leff, exh. cat., Carnegie Institute, 1959-60, no. 6

Antiquities, Sotheby's Parke Bernet, New York, 11 December 1976, lot 141

Antiquities and Islamic Art Including the Collection of the Late Lester Wolfe, New York, Sotheby's, New York, 1-2 March 1984, lot 201