The Hunters’ Palette: A Novel Explanation of the Enigmatic Double Bull, an Image That Survived through the Millennia

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Abstract

This paper proposes that the enigmatic double bull on the Hunters’ Palette, now at the British Museum and the Louvre, represents a rare type of mutant bovine, a conjoined twin of type ischiopagus. Although the incidence of this biological anomaly in cattle is low, it is likely that such creatures were observed from time to time in the Nile Valley. The case for a mutant bull is supported by pictures of modern ischiopagi, veterinary references, Nubian petroglyphs, and hieroglyphic signs. The portrayal of a mutant animal on predynastic palettes is not unprecedented.

Capart and Fischer suggested that the double bull was an early hieroglyph, but neither explained how or why it became a determinative in verbs meaning “to move back and forth.” It is possible that it was inspired by the back and forth grazing movement of a real double bull. The proposal would seem consistent with Frankfort’s observation about the profound influence of cattle on the ancient Egyptian language. The double bull hypothesis may also elucidate the puzzling association of such a creature with a canal in the Third Upper Nome of Egypt.

Other objects representing the double bull—amulets, seals, a macehead, etc.—are attested intermittently from the Predynastic to the Late Period when the amulet is rendered in the form of a “double Apis;” generally these objects have apotropaic connotations. Texts containing the double bull determinative exist more or less in parallel with the representational forms and maintain the same meaning throughout. The paper ends with a consideration of the Hunters’ Palette as an exhibit of military power.
Since it came to light in the nineteenth century, the Hunters’ Palette (British Museum EA 20792; Louvre E.11254) has received considerable attention (fig. 1). Nevertheless, the precise meaning of the complex scene—two rows of armed hunters herding a variety of desert animals—continues to be debated. This paper focuses on the enigmatic double bull carved on one of the “shoulders” of this large, possibly royal, ceremonial palette. The British Museum describes it as “a mythical beast consisting of the linked fore-parts of two buffalo;” for Baines, it is “a motif of the fused forequarters of two bulls facing in opposite directions.” Others use similar formulations. The double bull and adjacent structure have generally been interpreted jointly. Heuzey thought that they might be emblematic. Baines notes that “in late predynastic iconography the bull is a primarily royal symbol and this pair figure is likely to represent the king or kingship, or more broadly, royalty.” The building is also regarded as possibly religious because of the presence of the double bull. Although infrequent, various interpretations of the scene on the Hunters’ Palette specifically refer to the double bull. For example, Friedman observes “the hunters [controlling the animals] move towards the building defined by a double bull motif, probably signifying a religious structure for which and perhaps at which the action is taking place.” Patch describes the scene as one “where the animals are shown being brought under control before the gods or leaders, represented by the shrine and the double cow or bull.” While the remarks above describe the bull motif and seek to interpret the symbolism of the pair, they do not elucidate the nature of the creature itself.

Rather than a mythological animal, it is proposed that the double bull image represents a real bull, a rare type of conjoined twin with heads at both ends (ischiopagus). The notion that a mutant animal might be represented on a predynastic palette is not unprecedented. In fact, six cosmetic palettes depicting mutant creatures are known: three in the form of a double fish, one as two birds joined at their tails and two depicting dicephalous types of conjoined twin with heads at both ends (ischiopagus). The double fish palette at the Ashmolean Museum (1845.845) was found at Ballas in a tomb dated to Naqada IC, was described as a “turtle with heads at each end” by

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1 I extend great gratitude to R. Friedman for her early encouragement and commentary on the texts, to B. B. Williams for drawing my attention to the Abka and Mograkka rock drawings, to R. S. Bianchi, E. Wilkinson, and the late D. Huyge for suggesting relevant objects and references, to L. McNamara for the opportunity to study the macehead at the Ashmolean Museum, and to B. Monaghan for help in preparing the figures.


3 British Museum, curators’ comments. The Louvre’s website does not specifically comment on the double bull.


6 Baines, “Origins of Egyptian Kingship,” 112. Baines notes that the group of the building and double bull is a device that later disappears. See also Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 280.


8 Friedman, “Hierakonpolis,” 85.

9 Patch, “Early Dynastic Art,” 143.

10 J. Smolík, “Six Monstrous Zoomorphic Predynastic Palettes: Representations of Real Conjoined Twins?” Archéo-Nil 29 (2019), 179–93. The conjoined fish are possibly tilapia. The double fish palette at the Ashmolean Museum (1845.845) was found at Ballas in a tomb dated to Naqada IIB3(2). The two other fish palettes, one in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (1902.245), and the other in the Manchester Museum (9500), are of unknown provenance. Unfortunately, the latter also applies to the palettes in the form of twinned birds and a dicephalous turtle (side by side heads) in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (10.176.78 and 10.176.80).
the excavators of el-Amrah.\textsuperscript{11} That malformation is also of type ischiopagus. Interestingly, in this rather small sample, four variants of conjoined twinning are depicted; all represent a departure from well-known zoomorphic palettes of “normal animals.” Presumably these creatures had some special, but unknown, meaning to the ancient Egyptians to merit memorialization.

The Case for a Mutant (ischiojugular) Bull

The double bull on the Hunters’ Palette is highly stylized, but the muscles, tendons, hooves, and veins are rendered in considerable, if somewhat exaggerated, detail (fig. 2). Its impressive horns curve inward, but they may be idealized according to ancient Egyptian convention.\textsuperscript{12} At the extremities, two heads stare in opposite directions. It is plausible that the image was inspired by a real bovine conjoined twin of type ischiopagus. An embalmed bovine with this malformation is on display at the Gregorio Aguilar Barea Archaeological Museum in Juigalpa in the heart of Nicaraguan cattle country (fig. 3).\textsuperscript{13} Conjoined twinning (also known as congenital duplication) is a rare condition that afflicts humans and certain animal species, especially turtles, fish, and snakes. In cattle and sheep the anomaly is often manifested in the form of dual, side-by-side heads on a single torso (dicephalus parapagus dipus).\textsuperscript{14} However, the incidence of ischiopagus in cattle is less common. It is characterized by the fusion of the two spines at a 180-degree angle in the lower pelvic region i.e., the spinal axis extends in a straight line. Ischiopagus is also characterized by one or more underdeveloped hind legs protruding from the torso.\textsuperscript{15}

In figure 3, two legs (there may be others) of the bovine are barely visible at the very back of the display case.

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\textsuperscript{11} D. Randall-McIver and A. Mace, \textit{El Amrah and Abydos, 1899–1901}, EM 23 (London, 1902), 23, pl. 5.3. The present location of the ischiopagus turtle palette is unknown.

\textsuperscript{12} Hendrickx has observed that although a great variability in shape is attested in archaeological finds, the rendering of bull’s horns in predynastic and early dynastic art clearly became idealized and uniform. See Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 279.

\textsuperscript{13} https://notesfromcamelidcountry.net/tag/two-headed-cow/.

\textsuperscript{14} T. Hiraga and S. Dennis, “Congenital Duplication,” \textit{Veterinary Clinics of North America: Food Animal Practice} 9 (1993), 145–61. Almost all types of congenital duplications attested in humans are observed in food animals such as cattle. In cattle and humans, the anomaly occurs about once in 100,000 births.

\textsuperscript{15} In addition to the two pairs of “normal” forelegs, ischiopagus bovines may have up to four additional, often incompletely developed, “hind” legs emanating from the torso (ischiojugular tetrapus). If the creature that inspired the double bull in figure 2 here also had “extra” [hind] legs, they were omitted from the image; either they were small and on the non-visible side of the animal, or they were omitted to suit Egyptian aesthetic tastes.
One or more appendages—generally a tail, rarely a penis—may hang from the abdomen. Ischiopagus is a condition discussed in standard veterinary references such as Hiraga and Dennis. The authors remark that the animal shown here in figure 4 had four underdeveloped hind legs that were amputated from the spinal area. Presumably, the animal was considered viable.

Depending on the specific malformation, conjoined twins face various issues of survivability. Most are stillborn, or die soon after birth, often because of internal physical defects. Their viability depends on the normal functioning of the nervous system and internal organs (either shared or duplicated). Congenital duplication is a common cause of dystocia, i.e., difficult labor that endangers both mother and calf. The chances of a live birth are improved by human intervention during calving (apparently herdsmen often help to pull blocked fetuses). A relief in the Dynasty 5 tomb of Ti at Saqqara shows a herdman helping a cow with a delivery, overseen by a magician. In a cattle culture, this practice probably had a long history. Nurturing by humans would also enhance the animal's chances of survival.

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16 What appears to be a penis or bull sheath on the double bull is more likely to be an abnormal tail, common in bovine ischiopagus (personal communication, L. Denholm GAICD, Principal Policy Analyst and Program Evaluator, Department of Premier and Cabinet, New South Wales, Australia). Denholm has published widely on the genetic defects, developmental duplication (DD) and conjoined twinning in cattle. I am thankful to him for multiple other comments as well. Interestingly, the male ischiopagus specimen examined by Pathan had three tails and no penis. See M. Pathan, U. Kumblar, and S. Dandopant, “Dicephalus tetrapus tetrabrachius tricaudatus ischiopagus: a conjoined twin calf,” (2012): https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Ischiopagus-with-three-tails-two-are-completely-developed_fig1_230851401 (accessed December 21, 2020).

17 Hiraga and Dennis, “Congenital Duplication,” 146.

18 Hiraga and Dennis, “Congenital Duplication,” 147, fig. 3.


21 R. Ritter, The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice, SAOC 54 (Chicago, 2008), 229 and fig. 22(b). The magician was present to boost the chances of a successful birth. According to Ritter, there was little or no difference between a magician and a doctor at the time.

ischiopagus bovine faces greater challenges than normal animals do, in particular because restricted mobility makes it easier prey for predators. “Forward” movement requires the coordination of dual, independent brains to animate its two foreparts simultaneously in opposite directions; the two legs of one forepart must move “forward” while the other set of legs step “backwards.” Consequently, the animal’s normal movement would be largely linear, back and forth, suitable for grazing. However, rapid motion, whether linear or lateral, likely would be difficult.\(^{25}\)

Already in the Predynastic Period, the ancient Egyptians were known to have kept food animals and wild beasts in captivity for sacrifice, prestige, displays of power, and to embellish elite burials. At Hierakonpolis, for example, an elephant, leopard, and baboons were brought from afar; they, and as well as local species—the hippo, domestic cattle, and others—were buried near members of the elite in cemetery HK6 as demonstrations of their power and prestige. In several cases, the animal remains indicate long periods of captivity.\(^{24}\) A remarkable animal such as a conjoined twin bull could have been cared for and sheltered, perhaps in the adjacent shrine-like building (fig. 2), befitting an animal with possible religious connotations. Indeed, it would seem that such a creature would not be out of place in such a physical and ideological setting. The practice of royal menageries is also attested in the Dynastic Period when exotic beasts again served the leadership as status symbols and strong visual displays of power.\(^{25}\)

Since the Neolithic Period, cattle occupied a central place in the social fabric of the ancient Nile Valley dwellers.\(^{26}\) Cattle were of importance as an economic resource as well as for their symbolic and religious significance. In this context, the birth and survival of an actual double bull would have been a wondrous event,\(^{27}\) the creature perhaps having been interpreted as the incarnation of divine power,\(^{28}\) its duality and symmetry would also have appealed to the Egyptian mind. While religious practices in the Predynastic Period are open to question, it may be significant that the cult of the Apis bull, which involved the veneration of a creature selected on the basis of its distinctive appearance, is attested as early as the First Dynasty.\(^{29}\) The idea of venerating a two-headed bull would not be entirely foreign to Egyptian thought, at least in later periods. A remarkable scene on an architec-

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\(^{23}\) This particular animal could hardly be considered the powerful and raging (normal) bull occasionally portrayed in Pre-Early Dynastic iconography. See for example the so-called Bull Palette (Louvre, E11255) and Narmer Palette (Cairo Museum, CG 14716).


\(^{25}\) Friedman, “Hierakonpolis,” 88; R. Muller-Wollmer, “Zooologische Garten‘ als Mittel der Herrschaftslegitimation im alten Ägypten,” \textit{HO} 33 (2003), 31–43. In the present context, the so-called Botanical Garden built by Tuthmosis III at Karnak is noteworthy. One wall shows cattle with teratological anomalies, including those associated with conjoined twinning—one of the few post-Predynastic Period representations known of the condition. See N. Beaus, \textit{Le cabinet de curiosités de Thoutmosis III : Plantes et animaux du jardin botanique de Karnak}, OLA 36 (Leuven, 1990), 275, fig. 1a-e; 279–83, pls. 34–41. One animal has three clearly carved horns (the probable three horns of the adjacent animals have been defaced fig. 1e) while another has a bifurcated tail (fig. 1b). Unfortunately, other relevant areas of the reliefs have been hammered or recut rendering identification of the beasts’ anomalies uncertain. However, Beaus proposes that the face of one bovine is split (“epodyne”) or that its two heads are partially merged (“rhinodyme,” fig. 1c). Most of the upper register (fig. 1a) is missing, but one of the front legs of an animal appears to be duplicated (“melomélée”) while a leg of the specimen in the center of the panel seems to be absent (“hémimélée”). These bovine anomalies are also discussed in Hiraga and Dennis “Congenital Duplication,” 145–49.


\(^{27}\) H. Frankfort, \textit{Ancient Egyptian Religion, An Interpretation} (New York, 1948), 12–13, stressed what he thought was the ancient Egyptians’ acute awareness of the special nature of animals, namely that all individuals of a species are nearly identical and that they never change in successive generations (unlike human beings). A real double bull would have departed from this reality and presumably made a powerful impression on the community.

\(^{28}\) For the community of Cajamarca mentioned above (note 22), the birth of a dicephalous calf had supernatural connotations, opinion being split as to whether the animal was an evil sign or a gift from God. For the religious and political significance that has, since antiquity, been attached to children born with malformations, see A. Lorenz, \textit{Mutants: On the Form, Variety and Errors of the Human Body} (London, 2003).

\(^{29}\) An inscription of a bowl naming Horus Aha alongside Apis seems bear out a statement of the Roman writer Aelian that the cult was founded by Menes (Narmer or Aha). A. Dodson, “Of Bulls and Princes: The Early Years of the Serapeum at Sakkara,” \textit{JARCE} 61.1 (Spring, 1995), 19–32. At least in later times, the Apis was considered physically unique, defined by the distinctive markings on the hide.
Fig. 5. Psamtek I before a “two headed bull god” (BM EA 20). Courtesy of the British Museum.

tural element carved several millennia later shows a “caped two headed bull god”30 worshiped by Psamtek I, of Dynasty 26 (British Museum EA 20) (fig. 5). The relief recalls statuettes of Egyptian kings venerating the Apis bull. It is possible that this unusual deity on the slab was inspired by a real dicephalous cow, heads side by side, such as the Peruvian specimen mentioned in note 22 above; this particular variant of conjoined twinning is considerably more common than ischiopagus.31

Double Bulls in Nubia: A Record in Rock Art?

Supporting the possibility that ischiopagus-type bovines were observed in antiquity are three, perhaps four, rock drawings in Nubia. Those in the Abka region, near the Second Cataract of the Nile, are no longer visible due to the inundation of the area. Documented by the Scandinavian Joint Expedition, the area was characterized by black patinated stone outcrops richly decorated with drawings of animals, humans and various objects.32 The presence of Neolithic, A, and C Group, and other cattle-breeding cultures is attested.33 The three images were

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found in two separate areas, designated Stations 154a and 157m, which together host nearly 600 images of cattle, the most frequently portrayed animal.\textsuperscript{34} It is thought that most of the cattle depicted here were domesticated.\textsuperscript{35}

At Station 154a, two of the hammered representations of double bulls were designated as L185, described as possibly a “double headed ox or antelope,” and L184, as “a double-headed quadruped” (fig. 6).\textsuperscript{36} Both creatures are shown in profile, their (presumably stylized) horns forming closed circles, oriented toward the viewer. The relative size of the horns suggests that adults are portrayed. Whether or not the two images are contemporary or if they represent the same individual is open to question. The double bulls are separated by an apparently normal bovine with a curled tail (L186). The three are surrounded by a giraffe, antelope, and other easily identifiable animals, suggesting an unremarkable scene. Despite their exceptional physiology, the double bovines are treated as normal animals; they are not highlighted on the rock face by size, a preferential location, or framing of any type.

The third ischiopagus-type creature, C392, was portrayed on an outcrop at Station 157m. Described as an “ox [that] appears to have one head at each end, each with V-shaped horns.” It is “probably the superposition of one ox on another.”\textsuperscript{37} However, there is no evidence on the drawing of “doubling” such as the presence of the extra legs of a second animal. It is noteworthy that no representations of mythical or composite creatures are attested in the region that might suggest a local population with an Egyptian-style imagination.\textsuperscript{38}

The fourth possible example of a rock drawing of a double bovine is found south of Abka, in the archaeological area comprising Mograkka and Kosha where human habitation from the Neolithic to the Christian era is attested. The archaeological remains and petroglyphs were the subject of a joint French and Sudanese expedition

\textsuperscript{34} Hellström, The Rock Drawings, vol. 1, part 1, table 2, 52.

\textsuperscript{35} Hellström, The Rock Drawings, vol. 1, part 1, 29. The author believes that the majority of the drawings depict domesticated cattle, but that the possibility of some wild fauna among them cannot be excluded. However, Davis opines that it is impossible to tell the difference between domesticated and wild cattle from rock drawings. W. Davis, “The Earliest Art in the Nile Valley,” in L. Krzyzaniak and M. Kobusiewicz (eds.), Origin and Early Development of Food-Producing Cultures in the North East Nile Valley (Poznan, 1984), 81–94. Whether an ischiopagus bovidae could survive in the wild would depend on its specific abnormalities and the habitat. Pictures have been posted by hunters online of double deer (ischiopagus), two adult deer joined at their heads and other cases of abnormal, wild bovidae, but these cases were not verified by medical experts.

\textsuperscript{36} Hellström, The Rock Drawings, vol. 1, part 1, 78 (site 154a.8). Drawings L184 and 185 are in vol. 1, part 2, pl. Corpus L167–206; a photograph of the rock surface showing the two bulls is in pl. 17.3. It is unlikely that image L185 portrays an antelope because it differs markedly from the animal figures identified as antelopes in Corpus L.

\textsuperscript{37} Hellström, The Rock Drawings, vol. 1, part 1, 114 (site 157m.183). Drawing C392 is in vol. 1, part 2, Corpus 375–409. Drawing C528 at site 339 is in part 2. Corpus 521–53 may also show another double bovine, but the details are unclear.

\textsuperscript{38} Signs of an Egyptian presence in the Abka area are negligible. Only one example of Predynastic Egyptian iconography—a boat carving—has been found between the First and Second Cataracts. See D. Wengrow, The Archaeology of Early Egypt: Social Transformations in North-East Africa, 10,000 to 2650 BC (Cambridge, 2006), 113. A few scattered hieroglyphs from the Middle Kingdom were found at Abka. See Hellström, The Rock Drawings, vol. 1, part 1, 234–35.
during the early 1970s.\(^{39}\) Of specific interest here is Site 3-L-22B in Mograkka East on east bank of the Nile that is characterized by drawings of a large number of bovids. What Vila describes as a bovid with two heads is one of twenty images engraved on small granite outcrops along the river. Unfortunately, the image of the bovid was roughly hammered on an uneven surface (fig. 7).\(^{40}\) Nevertheless, the dual foreparts can be clearly identified; the horns appear to be of the incurved type.

Due to the well-known difficulties of dating petroglyphs, it is doubtful that reliable dates can be attached to the double bull images. Hendrickx has noted that the plethora of rock art representing cattle in Upper Egypt and probably also in Nubia can be placed in the Naqada II and III periods.\(^{41}\) Studies conducted at Abka attest to a longer time frame. Interestingly, one of the few excavations conducted in the area was at Abka Station 154a, below the two double bull images. It yielded dates ranging from around 4650 BC (corrected carbon C14 date) to the First Millennium AD,\(^{42}\) but no finds at any strata could be reliably associated with the particular rock drawings above.

Other Early Objects Bearing Representations of the Double Bull

In addition to the image on the Hunters’ Palette, several other early objects appear to take the form of an ischiopagus bull: three ivory amulets, a decoration surmounting a rhomboidal cosmetic palette, and a macehead (Table 1).\(^{43}\) Aspects of the carving suggest they are products of craft specialization, a practice that tends to be associated with religious and/or ceremonial centers.\(^{44}\) The three stylized ivory “double bull’s head” amulets (fig. 8), in the Brussels Museum (E.3381a-c),\(^{45}\) are presented in profile, with incurved horns, but without legs. Various features of the amulets suggest the work of a single artisan, or a single workshop: the torsos are nearly identical, although the proportions vary slightly; the pierced tenons and the delicate horns imply the careful removal of material; and the decorative lattices within the torso are carefully incised so as to retain a white substance. Due

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40 Vila, La Prospection Archéologique, 52, fig. 21.2. The image is 30 cm long.
41 Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 278.
43 Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” describes and places these objects in context. He applies the term “double bull” to the bovine on the Hunters’ Palette (p. 280); a macehead is in the form of the “foreparts of two bulls” (p. 280); there are three amulets with a “double bull’s head” (pp. 280–81, fig 16.1); and the rhomboid palette has “antithetical bull’s heads” (pp. 292–93, fig. 16.10). Hendrickx considers the amulets to be related to the Hunters’ Palette bull, but a possible relationship between all these objects is not specifically proposed.
45 Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 280–81, fig. 16.1. Hilton Price, the buyer of the amulets, was told that they came from Abydos: H. Price, “Some Ivories from Abydos,” PSRB 22 (1900), 160–61, figs. 1–3. His pictures reveal a white substance remaining in parts of the incised lattice.
Table 1. Representations of double bulls, object and script, and by period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Material / Location</th>
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<td><strong>Museum / Location</strong></td>
<td><strong>Acc. No.</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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a: Dates of rock art are uncertain
b: Date: Intermediate Period - New Kingdom, see text  
(c) Period uncertain

BM: British Museum; EA: Egyptian Museum; MMA: Metropolitan Museum of Art
UCL: University College London (Petrie)  
For references see text
to their size (ca. 10 x 5 cm), proportions, and the single suspension loop, it is doubtful that the amulets were practical and for daily adornment. The fact that there are three virtually identical examples points to some standardization of design and suggests that the motif enjoyed recognition beyond the owners. Price seems to imply that he purchased the three objects at the same time, so it is tempting to suppose that they were discovered in close proximity, perhaps even coming from a shrine or a workshop.

What appear to be the remains of an ischiopagus-type bull surmounts a unique rhomboidal cosmetic palette now at the Brussels Museum (E.2182) (fig. 9). Only a handful of this particular type of palette is of known provenance; the dates range from Naqada IC to (mostly) Naqada IIA–IIC. The mounting of the double bull on a tip of a palette is reminiscent of single birds on two rhomboidal palettes now at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology (Z 36229) and the Fitzwilliam Museum (E.16.1930). The latter was excavated by Brunton at Matmar and assigned sequence dates of SD 41–48 (Naqada IIA–IIC?), so it is possible that the double bull rhomboid was produced in that time frame as well. Rhomboidal palettes, like other cosmetic palettes, were used to grind decorative minerals which, applied to the body, were thought to also provide protection to the owner. All of the above are likely to have been elite goods produced by skillful craftsmen; the carving in stone of the fragile bulls’ horns at an extremity of the rhomboid palette must have been challenging.

The double bull motif also appears in the form of a double-ended, serpentine macehead now at the Ashmolean Museum (E.134) (fig. 10). Found in the Main Deposit at Hierakonpolis, it is the only predynastic double bull object of known provenance (although probably not in its original location). In terms of size, it falls between most of the pear-shaped personal or votive maces and the large, ceremonial Scorpion and Narmer maceheads.

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46 Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 292–93, fig. 16.10.
47 Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 292, after W. M. F. Petrie, Prehistoric Egypt, BSAE/ERA 31 (London, 1920), pl. XLIV; W. M. F. Petrie, Corpus of Prehistoric Pottery and Palettes, BSAE/ERA 32 (London, 1921), pl. XVIII. The “horns” on type 91T are shaped as a continuous unbroken curve with tipped ends; palette type 91U horns are the incurved type.
48 Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 313, Appendix K.
49 G. Brunton, Matmar, British Museum Expedition to Middle Egypt 29 (London, 1948), pl. 15, item #29.
50 The dating question is revisited below. Ostriches, hippos, giraffes, and other quadrupeds have been carved in comparable style, topping the handles of early predynastic ivory and bone combs. See, for example, D. Patch, “From Land to Landscape” in Patch (ed.), Dawn of Egyptian Art, 57–59. The examples cited by Patch date mostly to Naqada late NI–NII (3700–3300).
52 J. Quibell, Hierakonpolis I, ERA 4 (London, 1900), 8, pl. 19, item #3; pl. 25 (lower half). B. Adams, Ancient Hierakonpolis Supplement (Warminster, 1974), 12. Quibell describes the serpentine mace as the foreparts of two bulls. The bovine identification has been largely accepted, see W. Needler, Predynastic and Archaic Egypt in The Brooklyn Museum. Willbour Monographs 9 (Brooklyn, 1984), 261; Ciałowicz, Les palettes Égyptiennes aux motifs zoomorphes et sans décoration, 45–46; Hendrickx “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 280, among others. However, it has also been described as a “mace in shape of double ram’s head” by J. Quibell and F. Green, Hierakonpolis II, ERA 5 (London, 1902), 30, 38, but also as a “double bull mace” on pl. XLVIIIa of the same volume, and as an antelope on a label accompanying the object on display at the Ashmolean Museum (July 2019). The mace is definitely of serpentine, not limestone as noted in Quibell and Green, Hierakonpolis II, 38 and Adams, Ancient Hierakonpolis Supplement 12.
53 The author measured the length as 13.1 cm, as opposed to c. 10.6 cm cited in Quibell and Green, Hierakonpolis II, pl. XLVIIIa; also
also found there. The speckled bichrome stone renders the recumbent creature’s characteristics somewhat difficult to discern. However, the ears and horns are carved in relief, the latter curling backwards around the head (protruding horns being impractical on a stone macehead). Drilled almond-shaped holes, possibly originally encrusted, serve as eyes; one eye socket has been chipped off, and the top of the haft hole is damaged. The legs, also in relief, are folded beneath the torso, but they are missing on one side, as though sheared or ground off. The modern base permits upright display.

The macehead was found in a trench in the southwest verger of the Main Deposit. Within a distance of three meters lay other maceheads, various small objects, and a grouping that included the Two Dog Palette, now also at the Ashmolean Museum (1896.1908.E3924). It is difficult to judge the importance of the double bull macehead in the context of those particular finds. However, it has been argued that the objects from the Main Deposit are associated with an area where festivals of kingship and royal power were celebrated, in particular the sed. The objects are generally “royal in nature,” many of them readily associated with kings, the ideology of kingship and power. The presence of various carved ivories associated with royal cultic activity, e.g., curved staffs and scepters, is notable in this regard. Most significant of the predynastic objects are the Narmer Palette and the Scorpion and Narmer Maceheads. Evidently, the double bull piece is not in the same class. However, it is distinguished as the only zoomorphic macehead discovered at the site, and by the serpentine stone and bovine attributes long associated with kingly power. These features also set it apart from the hundreds of other maces and the numerous small, seemingly mundane, items—vases, bowls, and animal figurines.

The Main Deposit itself has been variously compared to a disposal pit for mainly discarded temple offerings or to a foundation deposit establishing the cultic significance of the site. According to the latter view, certain objects selected for burial—ivories, weapons, and other symbols of power—were “decommissioned” so as to render them actually and symbolically powerless; the presence of stone maceheads is suggestive of such a process. Interestingly, Green observed that the damage around the top of the haft hole of the double bull macehead could be explained by hammer strokes intended to remove the haft prior to burial, actions that would support the “decommissioning” hypothesis. That someone would take the trouble to do so implies that the object and the removal of the haft was of some importance.

The Double Bull as an Emblem?

Taking account of the marked differences in representational forms, a broad similarity exists between the predynastic objects decorated with the double bull. That, and the rarity of the motif, raise questions whether these objects are somehow related, perhaps inspired by a common source in about the same time frame. Unfortunately, the lack of provenance rules out establishing reliable dates for any of these objects. The Naqada III Period is

Adams, Ancient Hierakonpolis Supplement, Appendix 3a (pl. 48a). The author weighed the mace, and at 441 grams, it is likely to be heavier than most maceheads.

Quibell and Green, Hierakonpolis II, 31.


McNamara, “The Revetted Mound at Hierakonpolis,” 929.

Most of the numerous maceheads found in the Main Deposit are small, disc, or piriform in shape, the latter generally carved of limestone. Quibell and Green, Hierakonpolis II, 30–32, pls. XIXIA, b. For a compendium of those now at the Petrie Museum, see Adams, Ancient Hierakonpolis, xiii, 5–13. Several are only partially perforated indicating a purely votive function.


Adams, Ancient Hierakonpolis Supplement, 12, on the basis of F. Green’s notes.
often cited for the Hunters’ Palette, but dates for the other items have not been proposed. As regards the double bull rhomboid palette, a limited number of diamond-shaped palettes have been found in contexts datable mainly to Naqada IIA–IIC; they include undecorated palettes but also a few surmounted by devices interpreted as bull’s horns. Therefore, the double bull rhomboid might be assumed to belong to the same early period, probably placing it centuries before the Hunters’ Palette.

A common, crucial feature of the double bull objects is the depiction of a “complete” or whole bodied bull. However, images of “whole” bovines are rare in the Predynastic Period, appearing almost exclusively on early White Crossed Line Pottery (WCLP) in Naqada I–IIA. Significantly, for some time thereafter, bovines are represented only by horns of various style, often engraved, solitary heads and other features such as the devices on rhomboid palettes of type 91T and U. Depictions of “whole” bulls (though relatively small), emerge only later, on ivory knife handles and a comb. Three of these handles have been attributed to Naqada IID–IIIA (Table 2). If the “completeness” of a bull can be accepted as a reliable indicator of dating, it follows that the double bull rhomboid could have been made in Naqada IID–IIIA, not in Naqada IIA–IIC as were other rhomboids. It is possible that a (“complete”) double bull image of the proposed Naqada IID–IIIA date was grafted onto a traditional rhomboid palette, the shape having survived (or been resurrected) beyond the last currently documented dates. For the same reasons it is possible that Naqada IID–IIIA date may apply to all the double bull objects (figs. 1–2, 8, 9, 10).

It is possible that the double bull (and building) on the Hunters’ Palette had been adopted for its “emblematic character.” If this is indeed the case, how this came about is necessarily a matter of speculation. In a separate and more general context, Frankfort proposed that a particular emblem might be chosen by a town or province to represent a local deity. Above, the idea that a real double bull had been interpreted by the ancient Egyptians as a manifestation of a divinity (or spirit), one possessing supernatural powers, was discussed; the two heads (or two whole foreparts) may have been regarded as doubling the power of a single bull. How the decision in favor of this emblem would have been taken—by the elite, or unilaterally by a proto-king (or headsman)—is difficult to know. A proto-king may have associated himself with the creature, in the manner in which leaders are known to have identified with powerful animals. The incorporation of the double bull into royal iconography would

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62 The British Museum dates the Hunters’ Palette to Naqada III; the Louvre does as well, adding dates of 3300–3100 BC, which is also the formulation used by Patch, “Early Dynastic Art,” 140.
63 Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 292. Of the thirteen provenanced rhomboid palettes listed in his Appendix K, eight could be dated, of which four are topped by stylized horns (i.e., Petrie’s types 91T–U). In a later, forthcoming publication, Hendrickx mentions that there are now 100 rhomboid palettes from known excavations and perhaps double that without known provenance. Of the former, the number of dated palettes is not provided. See S. Hendrickx, “Decorated Palettes of a Different Type,” 35–36.
64 Given the later royal symbolism of the bull, it is perhaps ironic that the double bull macehead is among the largest representations of a “complete bull” (or whole bodied bull) from the Predynastic Period. It is only slightly shorter than the bull on the Bull Palette at the Louvre (E 11255), but larger than the one on the Two Dog palette (Ashmolean Museum, AN1896-1908 E.3924), the latter two being reliefs rather than three-dimensional figures.
65 The earliest representations of “whole” bulls, though limited in number, are found on White Cross Lined Pottery (WCLP); Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 276–77 and Appendix A. Also S. Hendrickx, F. Förster, and M. Eycker, “Le taureau au Prédynastique et son importance pour le développement de l’iconographie royale - avec une excursion sur l’origine du sceptre heqa,” in S. Aufrère (ed.), Les taureaux de l’Egypte ancienne (Nîmes, 2020), 33–73. Only a few of this group can be dated, mostly to Naqada I-IIA. The “whole” bull image practically disappears on the later Decorated Pottery, of which only two examples are known, the dated one being from Dakka (Naqada II-CD?), See Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” 277 and Appendix B.
66 Hendrickx, “Bovines in Egyptian Predynastic and Early Dynastic Iconography,” Appendices E, F, I, and M.
68 Heuzey, “Égypte ou Chaldée,” 64.
69 Frankfort, Ancient Egyptian Religion, 21.
70 For example, see Hendrickx and Förster, “Early Dynastic art and iconography,” 835, 847.
explain its presence on the Hunters’ Palette. Although hypothetical, this explanation would broadly accord with Baines’ view that the bull-building pair represents a king, kingship, or more broadly, royalty.71 Patch also interprets the pair as depicting a god or leaders.72

Table 2: Bulls appearing on knife handles/combs and dates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Knife handles/comb</th>
<th>Tomb</th>
<th>Museum</th>
<th>Acc. No.</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Bull/cattle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abu Zaidan</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>09.889.118</td>
<td>IID–IIIA</td>
<td>A8, B8 B10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carnarvon</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>MMA</td>
<td>26.7.1281</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>A3, B1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Davis comb</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>MMA</td>
<td>30.8.224</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>A4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierakonpolis</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>storage</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>III A2</td>
<td>A5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pitt Rivers</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>BM</td>
<td>EA68512</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>A4, A6, B3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abydos</td>
<td>U-j</td>
<td>Cairo?</td>
<td>na</td>
<td>IID–IIIA</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Animal presence: Side and row number
BM: British Museum; MMA Metropolitan Museum of Art
knife handles except for the Davis Comb
na: Not available

The double bull macehead was probably commissioned by a headsman or proto-king to wield and demonstrate his power and dominance. On the other hand, the rhomboid palette and the three amulets are likely to have been personal items,73 suggesting a broader popular acceptance of the emblem.74 They may be among the art forms that gradually disappeared with the onset of unification and rule by what Kemp refers to as an “innovative but indigenous court circle” that introduced a developing “official” art.”75 Questions have been raised about the presence of the numerous maceheads found at Hierakonpolis. Were they votive objects “dedicated within the enclosure by successive kings or sequestered symbols of power called in from local rulers by a single king?”76 Either reason might explain the presence of the double bull macehead in the Main Deposit (and possibly the Hunters’ Palette in the same or comparable context elsewhere).

Double Bull-Related Objects in the Dynastic Period

Although the double bull motif disappears after the Late Predynastic-Early Dynastic Period, it reappears hundreds of years later in the Old Kingdom (see Table 1).77 Interestingly, certain tendencies observed in the Predynastic Period are continued in the Old Kingdom. For example, the use of the double bull motif in personal adornment is seen in the form of amulets, which may have been worn as talismans or symbols of power. The migration of the double bull motif from personal objects to ceremonial ones is also observed, as seen in the double bull macehead found at Hierakonpolis.

72 Patch, “Early Dynastic Art,” 143.
73 Multiple use would be a characteristic of predynastic art, namely the tendency for a decorative form to migrate between different categories of objects and different materials. See Wengrow, The Archaeology of Early Egypt, 104–7.
74 It could be posited that the Hunters’ Palette, with likely royal connotations, would have been the first to display the image. Its broader adoption (at least on a limited number of court objects) would probably occur later. The popular adoption of royal falcon images for personal adornment at the beginning of Naqada III may be an example of such a tendency. See S. Hendricks, R. Friedman, and M. Eyckerman, “Early Falcons,” in L. Morenz and R. Kuhn (eds.), Vorspann oder formative Phase?: Ägypten und der Vordere Orient 3500–2700 v. Chr., Philippika 48 (Wiesbaden, 2011), 140–49. The alternative, the migration of the double bull image from a lower status palette, or amulet, to a ceremonial palette, would seem unlikely.
75 Kemp, Ancient Egypt, 134.
76 McNamara, “The Revetted Mound at Hierakonpolis,” 928.
77 Many of the representations of the double bull (and references) discussed in the following section, excluding amulets, are from S. Quirke, Birth Tusks: The Armory of Health in Context–Egypt 1800 B.C., Middle Kingdom Studies 3 (London, 2016).
nastic Period are seen in the Dynastic Period as well, namely the migration of the double bull motif between different categories of objects and materials. Generally the renderings appear to have elite, or even royal, associations. Three seals bearing images of the double bull date to Dynasty 5.78 They vary by type and material. A stamp seal of rock crystal is inscribed with a double bull centered on a “Hathor symbol,” the latter framed by a facing lion pair and a recumbent Seth animal (?) (Berlin 23371). The same motif is inscribed on a cylinder seal. On a gold disk seal, two addorsed bovid foreparts are positioned under a recumbent Seth animal. The fact that there are three seals, whether intended for private or administrative use, suggests that the motif was commonly recognized, at least among the local elite, and, perhaps, that it had been known for some time.

Approximately three centuries elapse before the double bull is attested again, this time in Dynasty 11 funerary contexts with royal associations. At Deir el-Bahari, three similar motifs are dated to the reign of Mentuhotep II.79 Only the one preserved in an object frieze inside the coffin of Aashyt, a queen consort,80 shows the complete intended grouping—a double bull between two flails81 inserted in ceremonial jars. This assemblage is flanked on both sides by rearing cobras and Wepwawet standards “collectively suggesting rights of kingship.”82 Only fragments of wall reliefs depicting a double bull and flails have survived in the tomb of Queen Neferu,83 likely the first queen of Mentuhotep, and in the tomb of the treasurer, Khety.84 The multiple examples of the double bull iconography in these elite contexts suggest that it was well established in this period. Probably somewhat later in date, but also from the Middle Kingdom, are four magic wands (also called tusks, or birthing tusks) each inscribed with a double bull.85 Two are now in the Egyptian Museum, Cairo (JE 56273, JE 18640), and one each in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (MMA 19.2.18a, b) and the British Museum (EA 24426, fig. 11).86 Three of them are said to have been purchased at Luxor; only JE 56273 in the Egyptian Museum was excavated, by the Metropolitan Museum at Asasif tomb 839.87 The horns of the bulls on two wands are incurved while those on the other two are lyre-shaped. However, their stylized elongated bodies are similar, with interior lines follow-

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78 Quirke, *Birth Tusks*, 502 (fig. 5.110).
79 Of the seven depictions of the double bull dating to the Middle Kingdom, at least six are associated with the Theban area.
81 The earliest representations of the flail make it one of the most ancient symbols of kingship and the ruler’s coercive power. See T. Wilkinson, *Early Dynastic Egypt* (London-New York, 1999), 190.
82 Quirke, *Birth Tusks*, 480.
83 Quirke, *Birth Tusks*, 479-80.
85 The double bull is not among the most represented motifs on the more than 150 known tusks.
86 Quirke, *Birth Tusks*, 105 (fig. 2.9), 187 (fig. 2.83), 269 (fig. 3.47), 289 (fig. 3.65).
87 Quirke, *Birth Tusks*, 105–6. Precise dates for the tusks are uncertain.
ing the curvature of the back, neck, and front leg attachment, and tails hang from the midsections. The wands are made of hippopotamus ivory, which, from earliest times, was believed to be magical, imbuing the user with the power of the beast.88 Virtually all the wands are decorated with threatening animals, mythical monsters, and deities.89 Most conveyed a negative connotation to the ancient Egyptians, but they were enlisted on the tusks against hostile real and supernatural powers. To that end, many figures, including the double bulls, brandish knives.

A bronze parade axe in the Metropolitan Museum (MMA 21.2.7; fig. 12) has a double bull in openwork. It has been attributed to as early as the First Intermediate Period and as late as Dynasty 18.90 The creature is shown in silhouette, its main features being clearly defined; the potentially important tail, discussed elsewhere in this paper, is as pronounced as on the Hunters’ Palette and magical tusks. As a weapon, the axe conceptually recalls the predynastic double bull macehead (fig. 10), but it has been considered insufficiently sturdy for combat.91 Hayes remarks that it is one of several such axes that are thought to have been given to officers of the armed forces as rewards for valor and were carried with them on state occasions. Given their prominent ceremonial role, it is likely that the bull image was well known at the time, at least among the elite, as were any magical powers attributed to it.

From the New Kingdom, three objects depicting the double bull are attested (Table 1). One of them is a mold for the manufacture of small double bull inlays or pendants unearthed at Tell el-Amarna.92 Referring to a corpus of such objects from that site, Quirke notes that Akhetaten flourished not only during the period of the royal cult of Aten, but at least through the early years of Tutankhamun as well. This complicates the question whether some of deities represented in a host of recovered molds were worshipped during the period of the Aten cult or only afterwards;93 this uncertainty applies to the double bull inlay as well. Of a different nature are two amulets carved in carnelian. The Liverpool World Museum notes that the example in its collection was found in a dated grave at Esna.94 The upright bovine body is shown with a somewhat swayed, elongated back, reminiscent of the double bulls on the Middle Kingdom wands. The other carnelian example, a recumbent bull, was sold by the Zurqieh Company, an antiquities dealer, to a private buyer. In this case, the provenance is unspecified, or unknown, and the attribution to the New Kingdom is unexplained.95 Interestingly, the dealer described it as a “double-sided Apis bull amulet.” Its shape is comparable to that of the Louvre example (figs. 13a, b).

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88 For example, see G. Steindorff, “The Magical Knives of Ancient Egypt,” The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery 9 (1946), 42.
90 In Quirke, Birth Tasks, 506, it is attributed to the First Intermediate Period-early Middle Kingdom. But see Metropolitan Museum https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/544818?searchField=AccessionNum&amp;ft=21.2.7&amp;offset=0&amp;rpp=40&amp;amp;poo=1 (accessed March 19, 2022), for a Middle-early New Kingdom (Dynasty 12-18) date.
91 W. Hayes, Scepter of Egypt II: A Background for the Study of the Egyptian Antiquities in the Metropolitan Museum of Art: The Hyksos Period and the New Kingdom (1675–1080 B.C.) (New York, 1959), 213 (fig. 126). Hayes proposes that in this particular setting, the double bull symbolized the “two-valved door of heaven and its Janus-like guardian.”
92 Quirke, Birth Tasks, 538 (fig. 5.156, (306m)), 539, citing W. F. M. Petrie, Tell el Amarna (London, 1894), pl. XVII, no. 306. The image was drawn from a recovered mold but apparently no pendant created from it was found. See Petrie, Tell el-Amarna, 28 and pl. XVII.
93 Quirke, Birth Tasks, 537.
94 National Museums Liverpool 25.11.05.163. The museum website describes it as “a finely carved carnelian double headed bull or calf amulet” found together with New Kingdom pottery in Esna grave 69E/05. The suspension loop is carved on the side of the creature rather than on its back. The dimensions are 30 x 13 x 8 w mm. https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/artifact/double-headed-bull-amulet (accessed March 18, 2022).
95 Zurqieh Co, L.L.C., an internet antiquities dealer based in Dubai. https://www.vcoins.com/fr/stores/zurqieh/171/product/ancient_egypt_carnelian_double_sided_apis_bull_amulet__new_kingdom_1400__1200_bc/1167407/Default.aspx (accessed April 3, 2022). The dimensions are given as 23 l x 18 h mm; copies of on-line photos are available from the author. The proposed New Kingdom date may have been arrived at by comparison to the Liverpool carnelian
Four amulets representing recumbent double bulls have been dated to the Late Period (Table 1). The aforementioned specimen, made of shiny blue-green faience (figs. 13a–b), is described by the Louvre as two antithetical bull protomes.96 Petrie uses a similar formulation, labeling the three amulets as “two bulls, foreparts” shown only in profile (fig. 14).97 He adds that this is a “very ancient combination, appearing on one of the predynastic slate palettes” (i.e., the Hunters’ Palette) that had been discussed by Capart.98 All three are thought to belong to Dynasty 26. The material is a glazed ceramic tinted in different shades of green; two of the amulets, 223a and b, were found at Hawara in the Fayyum. Although there are similarities among the amulets, the variations in modeling suggest the work of separate ateliers; the differences also imply that the basic motif was generally recognized, at least in a particular area.

As was noted, Zurqieh Co. labelled its amulet as a “double sided Apis bull.” Each of the two heads is capped by a sun disc set between the horns, a symbol associated with the Apis. The uraeus, also linked to Apis, has been omitted.99 The Apis identification receives support from the Walters Art Museum that interprets a two-sided pendant in its collection as formed by addorsed Apis and leonine foreparts.100 As regards the Louvre pendant, a conservator mentions the discs, but not a possible relation to the Apis.101 In these three cases, the solar discs are clearly identifiable in frontal views of the amulets, but in profile, they appear amulet (which however lacks the sun discs). Dodson remarks on the increase in evidence for the Apis cult in the New Kingdom, in particular the treatment of the animal after death: see Dodson, “Of Bulls and Princes,” 19.

96 The accession number of the Louvre pendant is AF 13553 and its dimensions are 3.25 l x 1.85 h x 0.8 w cm. https://collections.louvre.fr/recherche?q=AF+13553 (accessed March 21, 2022).
97 Petrie, Amulets, 45 and pl. XXXIX, nos. 223a-c. Petrie notes that one is in the St. Petersburg collection and that another was in the Hilton Price collection. Amulet 223b, measuring about 2.5 x 2 cm is now in the Petrie Museum (LDUCE-UC28168). https://collections.ucl.ac.uk/Details/collect/42497.
98 Petrie, Amulets, 45; Capart, Primitive Art, fig 170.
99 On statues (or larger figurines) of the Apis, the upper head “assembly” consists of a sun disc between two horns, a uraeus abutting the front of the disc and ears below the horns (all of this is difficult to see in profile). Small amulets omit the uraeus, and often the ears as well. The Apis, associated with Memphis, is sometimes shown without the sun disc. The Mnevis bull, associated with Heliopolis, is also shown with a solar disc. Presumably identification of the intended bull on the amulets would be uncertain.
100 The Walters Art Museum dates the amulet to the Late Period: https://art.thewalters.org/detail/5134/combined-fore-parts-of-lion-apis-bull/ (accessed March 18, 2022). Acc no. 48.1747, dimensions are 1.91 x 0.96 h x 0.2 w cm.
only as vertical knobs (e.g., fig. 13a). The question arises whether Petrie’s three double bull amulets—shown only in profile (fig. 14)—were also intended to depict the Apis. Petrie himself is silent on the issue; he also fails to mention the knobs (which almost certainly depict solar discs). Elsewhere in the same volume, Petrie discusses “normal” Apis amulets, although his figures show them only in profile. In fact, the knobbed heads of these Apis amulets are indistinguishable from those of the double bull amulets (fig. 14). It is very likely that the three double bull amulets represent what may be referred to more accurately as “double Apis” amulets.

If this identification is accepted, the five “double Apis” amulets could reflect the syncretism of two different iconographies, each with its own distinct symbolism. It is possible that in the Late Period (or even earlier), the ancient double bull motif merged with that of the then popular Apis bull image, the resulting creation retaining the double bull’s important concepts of symmetry and duality. Symbolically, the new iconography incorporated the traditional protective aspect of the double bull (discussed below) and the religious potency of the Apis (as the herald of the creator god, Ptah). Consequently, the “double Apis” amulet could have been considered an exceptionally powerful symbol (to somewhat modify Huyge’s terminology). It may be recalled that the practice of creating symbolically extra powerful composite animals, by incorporating the particular potency of each creature, harkens back to the Predynastic Period. Bearing in mind that the sample of Apis bull amulets is very small, it is nevertheless interesting that no double bull amulet without sun disc seems to be known after the New Kingdom. Is this an accident of discovery, or did the perceived symbolically superior power of the double Apis amulet become dominant, the way that market forces drive out old “inferior” products? Or did the ancient double bull image simply disappear because of the popularity of the “normal,” perhaps better understood, Apis amulets?

Continuity, Change, and Chronological Gaps

The discussion of various representational objects bearing the double bull image reveals a more or less continuous record from the late Predynastic to the Late Period (Table 1). During this time, the bull image remains broadly unchanged: the horns generally remain incurved, the proportions of the foreparts vary only modestly, and the creature is depicted upright or recumbent (or lacking legs). The identification is never in question. Continuity is also apparent in the apotropaic attributes of the double bull image. The protective nature of several predynastic objects has already been mentioned (for the Hunters’ Palette, see below). The first attested Dynastic Period objects are the late Old Kingdom seals that are likely to be apotropaic as well as functional. However, the interpretation of the double bull images in the Dynasty 11 funerary context is uncertain. Due to their relative chronological proximity to the antecedent apotropaic seals, it is possible that these tableau were intended to be protective as well, that is, the double bull safeguarded the deceased in the afterlife. In the Middle Kingdom, magic tusks are known to have been employed to protect individuals and possibly places. The impressive ceremonial axe bearing a double bull was likely to have been a symbol of power as well as protection through deterrence. In the New Kingdom and the Late Period, the double bull is attested in the form of ceramic, wearable amulets. Thus, while considerable changes occur in the types of objects represented, especially from the Predynastic to the Dynastic Period, a certain continuity is evident in the bull image as well as in the apotropaic

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102 The Petrie amulet at UCL is shown only in profile, without comment.
103 Petrie, Amulets, 43–44, pls. XXXVII (207a-g), XLV (207b).
106 Precise comparisons are complicated by differences in materials, art form, and mode of execution.
107 This possible function of the double bull in the funerary tableau has not previously been proposed. The Metropolitan Museum interprets the assembly of the funerary ointment jars and flails as ritual objects symbolizing the purification of the deceased (https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/565097). In this context, the double bull may symbolize the setting and rising sun.
108 For example, Metropolitan Museum of Art task 26.7.1288 is inscribed: “We have come in order to draw protection of life around the lady of the house, Merisenebes,” in Quirke, Birth Tusks, 251.
qualities. The double bull motif enjoyed a remarkable lifetime, but in general it is represented on minor items. Apparently, it never entered the mainstream of Egyptian art in the form of statues and sizeable wall paintings. Chronological gaps pervade the archaeological record of the double bull summarized in Table 1. Of course, they are to be expected given the vagaries of object survival and excavation, but political and religious developments may have played a role as well. As noted above, the disappearance of the double bull in the late Predynastic (or Early Dynastic) Period may have been a consequence of the unification of Egypt and the replacement of traditional (indigenous) art forms by “official” (formal) iconography. Fisher has suggested that in the Old Kingdom, traditional magical objects largely vanish due to constraints on the freedom of expression of popular superstition. The reappearance of the double bull image in the Middle Kingdom is particularly interesting because of the possible parallels with the re-emergence of several fabulous predynastic creatures. The serpopard, griffin, and Seth animal, prominently portrayed on several predynastic ceremonial palettes, reappear in a host of Middle Kingdom contexts. According to one theory, temple furnishings and other offerings that had become redundant were consigned to the ground sometime during the Old Kingdom only to be recovered during the temple renovations undertaken in the Middle Kingdom. It is likely that the ancient Egyptians’ reverence for antiquities explains the resurrection of old images and the discovery of new applications for them. A comparable scenario may apply to the double bull, supposing the recovery of the Hunters’ Palette or other double bull objects. Or perhaps the ancient finds in the Middle Kingdom merely revived the fortunes of a symbol that had largely fallen out of use. Double bull objects are attested again during the New Kingdom and Late Period, but their absence during Second and Third Intermediate Periods could be due to the upheavals of those times, accidents of preservation, or simply temporary loss of popularity. Despite this, the record creates the impression that the bull image and its apotropaic symbolism never completely disappeared from public consciousness.

The Double Bull as a Predynastic Hieroglyph?

A number of scholars have considered the possibility that the double bull on the Hunters’ Palette is an early hieroglyph. Capart, after rejecting several explanations for the image, concluded that it may have a phonetic value. In support of this hypothesis (as he refers to it), he drew attention to the word \(\text{သီီ} \text{သီီ} \text{သီီ} \text{သီီ} \) in the Pyramid Texts of Unis, where the double bull appears as a determinative. Capart adds that a variant of this word appears in the Dynasty 6 pyramid of Pepi I, the determinative, however, taking the form of two bulls’ heads facing in opposite directions \(\text{သီီ} \text{သီီ} \). Both variants have been interpreted by Gardner as “referring to doors or a door, possibly such as could swing both forwards and backwards.” Many years later, Fischer

———. 1987. The Archaeology of Early Egypt, 184, after B. Kemp, “The Osiris Temple at Abydos,” MDAIK 23 (1968), 138–55. At Elephantine, the site of the early shrine was simply filled in and paved over (Kemp, Ancient Egypt, 116).

111 Wahankh Intef II, the second king of the 11th (Theban) Dynasty initiated the renovation of several temples. See W. Grajetzki, The Middle Kingdom of Ancient Egypt (London, 2006), 14–15. Grajetzki’s text indicates that Intef II’s projects are the earliest known of the Middle Kingdom and would have preceded the reign of Mentuhotep II.

112 The provenance of the Hunters’ Palette is unknown. Wilkinson thought it possible that the palette, and other large ceremonial palettes of the late Predynastic Period—the Battlefield, Libyan and Bull palettes—were found in the temple area of Abydos: Wilkinson, Early Dynastic Egypt, 314. Also see notes to https://collections.louvre.fr/ark:/53555/c8010007344; Hendrickx, Förster, Piquette et al., “A History of the Visualization of the Hunters’ Palette,” 124.

113 On the survival of pre-formal (“primitive”) art alongside “official” art, see Kemp, Ancient Egypt, 134.


117 A. Gardiner, “A Unique Funerary Liturgy,” JEA 41 (1955), 13, n. 5. Found in a tomb below the Ramesseum, the Dynasty Thirteen
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proposed that the predynastic double bull “may well be a purely hieroglyphic creation.”118 The hieroglyph appears in the verb xns in a funerary liturgy of Dynasty 13 (fig. 15). Fischer translated it as to “move back and forth” (or, to move one way and then another).119 Figure 15 is a reproduction of a tracing showing the almost complete bull determinative.120 It includes an appendage stemming from the midsection that is commented on later.

The double bull sign is also known from the tomb of Petosiris (4th century BC), where the “backwards and forwards” interpretation of the verb is also supported.121 Finally, a canal in the Third Nome of Lower Egypt on the western edge of the Delta was named for, or associated with, the double bull ( ). Also see below.122

Fischer did not speculate on the possible origin of the double bull on the Hunters’ Palette or the rationale for its apparent eventual adoption as a determinative. More generally it has been observed that “many aspects, such as the development of the early sign corpus and the thought process behind it, have received little attention.”123 It is proposed here that the observation of the grazing back and forth movement of a real double bull may have given rise to a verbal expression for the complex movement and, perhaps, a name for the creature, “that which moves back and forth,” in the vein of animals (or people) named after the way they habitually move, e.g., grass hopper, pointer (dog), and darter (fish). That an animal would have inspired a word, or phrase, in ancient Egypt would not have been unusual. Ikram has noted that animals provided the inspiration for much of the Egyptian script. By her calculation, “about 20 percent of hieroglyphic signs are derived from animals, and for their religious beliefs.”125 The coining of an expression, or name, as proposed for the double bull would seem consistent with Frankfort’s view of the profound influence of cattle on the ancient Egyptian language. He noted that the animals played an “altogether extraordinary role in the consciousness of Egyptians. This led, on the one hand, to religious veneration, and, on the other hand, to the spontaneous production of cattle images and cattle similes whenever some unusual observation required figurative speech for an adequate expression.”126

fragmentary papyrus scroll was photographed by Quibell soon after its unrolling in 1927. Gardiner, “A Unique Funerary Liturgy,” 9. Gardner cites Pyramid Texts 416a and 1266c, which correspond to Allen’s PT 275 and PT534 and Capart’s Unas 527 and Pepi I 496, respectively.

118 Initially, Fischer considered the possibility that the double bull on the Hunters’ Palette depicted a real, monstrous animal, such as the diccephalous turtle represented in the form of a predynastic palette (see footnote 10). However, he rejected the monstrous animal hypothesis, proposing instead that the double bull was a hieroglyph, as used in the funerary liturgy document translated by Gardiner. It is likely that Fischer was independently aware of the two Pyramid Texts bearing the double bull determinative, although he does not mention it. See Fischer, “The Ancient Egyptian Attitude Towards the Monstrous,” 15 and plate 1, fig. 3.


124 Importantly, this explanation of the verb’s origin does not require the backward projection of the dynastic usage to the Predynastic Period. According to Gardner, in , “the determinative suggests simultaneous movement in opposite directions.” See Gardiner, “A Unique Funerary Liturgy,” 13. Clearly this is physically impossible and does not accord with motion described by the phonetic component of the verb. However, if the double bull, the logographic component, is assumed to represent the abstract idea of backward and forward movement (as argued here), the determinative and the phonetic components become fully complementary.


126 Frankfort, Kingship and the Gods, 163. Frankfort also observes (p. 162): “Egyptian texts of the most varied nature abound in metaphors, appraisals, and other expressions which relate to cattle.”
Interestingly, the representational forms of the double bull—amulets, seals, etc.—existed in parallel with script during two, possibly three, millennia (Table 1). It is difficult to know if any interaction occurred between the two modes of communication. Both show continuity throughout that period: the objects tend to be consistently apotropaic (as noted above), while the meaning of the hieroglyphic verbs is unchanging. The latter is consistent with the general observation that once a hieroglyph was introduced, it tended to have the same meaning for thousands of years.

**Did the Double Bull Represent a Real Animal? Some Last Thoughts**

To return to the original question: was the Hunters’ Palette double bull intended to represent a real conjoined twin bull or something else entirely? It has been described as a composite figure consisting of the addorsed protomes of two bulls, the fused forequarters of two bulls facing in opposite directions, or variations thereof. The description evokes the idea of a purely mechanical connection of two potentially stand-alone parts. However, the physiology of the double bull, including the tail, would seem to rule out such a hypothesis. A protome, or forepart, of an animal (or human) is considered, and generally shown, as a head on an upper torso only. However, the foreparts of the Hunters’ Palette creature extend to the pelvic area from which stems a prominent appendage, probably a tail that was considered sufficiently important to be depicted on the Hunters’ Palette, the Thirteenth Dynasty hieroglyph, the magic tusks and the metal ax.\(^{127}\)

Alternatively, it has been proposed that the double bull is simply another mythical creature—a hybrid animal—in the vein of the serpopard, griffin, and Seth animal,\(^{128}\) all well-known from the predynastic Two and Four Dog Palettes.\(^{129}\) Probably of later dates are the ibex-tilapia and the elephant-vulture inscribed on the Abu Zaidan knife handle, and the bull-fish in the form of a cosmetic palette.\(^{130}\) As the term implies, the hybrid creatures are composites of elements of different animal species (in a sense they do recall real animals because of their single heads, torsos with four legs and tails (or fins, depending on the creature). On the other hand, the double bull image on the Hunters’ Palette is basically different, departing from the hybrid model in several respects: the two foreparts belong to the same species; and the back-to-back assembly creates an unusual two-headed physiology. The most important distinction, however, is that the double bull image mirrors a real creature, an ischiopagus bovine, documented by veterinary science (which also applies to the mutant creatures represented on several cosmetic palettes). The rock drawings at Abka and Mograkka could be explained by someone simply observing and hammering the image of a real animal into stone, without recourse to innovation. Therefore, rather than to compare the double bull relief to a fantastic, hybrid creature, it would seem more apt to compare it to the freak animals represented in the predynastic cosmetic palettes.\(^{131}\) Those, too, are likely to have represented real animals that an artisan could simply observe and copy.

Although the incidence of ischiopagus in bovines is very low,\(^{132}\) it is nevertheless likely that multiple viable specimens appeared in the Nile Valley throughout the ages. The rock drawings at Mograkka and Abka are possible records or their presence. At Abka, two nearly adjoining double bovines with circular horns pose questions whether they portray a single or different individuals and, if the latter, were they coterminous? The separate

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\(^{127}\) Assuming the appendage is a penis does not alter the argument.

\(^{128}\) The hypothesis that these hybrids somehow served as models for the double bull would be difficult to verify, at least on the basis of available archaeological evidence.

\(^{129}\) Both palettes may be earlier than the Hunters’ Palette. According to Hendrickx, the decorated palettes are generally attributed to the end of Naqada II and the very beginning of Naqada III: Hendrickx, “Iconography of the Predynastic Period,” 80.

\(^{130}\) Huyge, “A Double Powerful Device for Regeneration,” 831–33, discusses the ibex-tilapia and the elephant-vulture. The hybrid bull-fish palette, which Hendrickx has dated to Dynasty 1, is at the Oriental Institute Museum (OIM E11470). Hendrickx, “Composite Animal Palette,” 200–201.

\(^{131}\) See note 10, above.

\(^{132}\) The malformation is thought to be a function of genetic and environmental factors that can vary between place and time. Regional data on bovid conjoined twinning is not systematically collected. However, in human populations, a relatively high incidence of the condition has been noted in Africa and India. See Y. Khan, “Ischiopagus Tripus Conjoined Twins,” *APSP Journal of Case Reports* 2.1 (Jan-April, 2011), 5. [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3418005/](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3418005/) (accessed July 12, 2020). The apparent concentration of double bull rock art images in Nubia is noteworthy in the context of Khan’s observation.
petroglyph of the double bovine with straight horns suggests the existence of a third individual in the area. A different animal may be assumed to have inspired the image on the Hunters’ Palette, given its probable Upper Egyptian origin. At least at Abka, evidence is lacking for artistic interchange that might explain the transmission of the image between the two venues. The historical association of a double bull with a canal in the Third Upper Nome of Egypt may provide another candidate for an individual specimen. It would seem plausible that a cattle-herding community would name a geographical feature after a remarkable creature that had been present in the area. Whether any other ischiopagus bovines (or more generally, double bovidae—sheep, goats, antelopes) appeared during the Dynastic Period, perhaps explaining some of the “reappearances” of the image cited in Table 1, is difficult to know.

The Hunters’ Palette as an Exhibit of Military Power: A Digression

Little is known of the historical context of the Hunters’ Palette and the double bul related objects. Referring more broadly to predynastic low relief scenes in stone, Kemp notes the total absence “of many of the most distinctive features of the iconography of historic times. Almost the whole of the later iconography of kingship is missing” until the Scorpion Macehead and the Narmer Palette. Hendrickx and Förster have made similar observations about the ceremonial palettes: “most of the stylistic characteristics of the Early Dynastic representations are not attested for the Predynastic period.” It is interesting to compare the iconography of the Hunters’ Palette, dated broadly to Naqada III, to certain rock tableau for which the dates are known with some confidence. Inscription 1, a tableau on the Gebel Tjauti rock formation, exhibits one of the earliest extensive corpuses of “early royal iconography that is paralleled in the art and inscriptions of the late Predynastic Period and Dynasty 0.” Those documents, together with the finds from Tomb U-j at Abydos, suggest that the tomb and the Gebel Tjauti inscription are contemporary, the authors proposing a date of Naqada IIIA1 (ca. 3200 BC). The prominent early hieroglyphic inscriptions on the rock tableaux at el-Khaway also considered royal markers, belong to the tradition and time of the Tomb U-j as well. Together, the Gebel Tjauti and el-Khaway tableaux suggest an iconographic thread that leads to the formal style. However, significantly, the iconography of Hunters’ Palette has little, if anything, in common with those two tableaux or the finds at Abydos or Hierakopolis. Yet Baines seems to have considered it among the artistically superior (and probably royal) of the times.

133 An unprovenanced double bovine-like palette, purchased by J. H. Breasted in Egypt in 1920, is now at the Oriental Institute Museum (E 11469). See Hendricks, “Iconography of the Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods,” 79–80, fig 8.5. Hendricks describes it as it having “double bovine heads and bird heads,” and dates it to Naqada IIA–III. The museum’s website (https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/ id/257a02ca-2e93-40a7-a2de-2e0cc4f95abb (accessed July 15, 2020), describes it as a “double hartebeest with head and horns,” though that description predates Hendrickx’s study of the piece. However, the object is ambiguous, combining elements of an ischiopagus with unrelated predynastic artistic conventions.

134 Brugsch, Dictionnaire Géographique d’Ancienne Égypte, 1022.

135 Insert new footnote here: Of interest in this context is the inspiration for a potmark of a double animal of unknown identity incised on a storage jar found in the C Group cemetery at HK 27C. See R. Friedman, “Animals Among the Nubian Residents at Hierakopolis,” in Nekhen News 33, 34–35. Given the long legs and backward sweeping horns, it may represent a type of antelope.

136 Kemp, Ancient Egypt, 92.


138 As noted above, a time frame of 3300–3100 BC is cited for Naqada III, which would correspond from Naqada IIIA to roughly late Naqada IIIIB, according to C. Köhler’s chronology table in Teeter (ed.), Before the Pyramids, 8.


141 Darnell, “The Early Hieroglyphic Inscription at el-Khaway,” 49–64.

142 Hendrickx and Förster, “Early Dynastic art and iconography,” 826–52.

143 Hendricks, “Iconography of the Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods,” 79–80, fig 8.5. Hendrickx describes it as a “double hartebeest with head and horns,” though that description predates Hendrickx’s study of the piece. However, the object is ambiguous, combining elements of an ischiopagus with unrelated predynastic artistic conventions.

144 The exception may be the falcons on the standards carried by men leading the columns of hunters. At some time, the falcon becomes...
decorated palettes. A possible explanation is that the Hunters’ Palette (and the three other bull-related objects) represent an alternative, but advanced, tradition of a chieftain/proto-kingdom that existed roughly in parallel with the one responsible for the rock tableaux and that eventually prevailed in unifying the country.

Kemp has considered the political-military environment in which proto-states functioned, observing that the more successful “incipient city states had become engaged in more organized conflicts over territory.” The military challenges of the times may be a theme of the Hunters’ Palette that has not received much attention; several aspects of the martial iconography stand out. First of all are the standards and the military-like order of the men positioned around the long edges of the palette. Second, most of the men carry weapons more suitable for combat than for capturing and controlling animals. Seven men are armed with metal-headed spears (two men hold two spears) and an equal number hold bows (some with bunches of arrows), both instruments designed to kill. Several men hold maces used in hand-to-hand combat or for dispatching prisoners (fit or wounded). Throw sticks, traditionally associated with hunting, can be effective anti-personnel missiles as well; a number of throw sticks terminate in onion-shaped heads also rendering them dangerous as maces. Of course, a prudent hunting party would carry killing weapons, as the fallen lions attest. However, if the primary purpose is to capture sacrificial animals, the preponderance of heavy weapons would seem to be out of place: of a total of nineteen men, fourteen—nearly three-quarters—bear spears and bows. Only two men wield ropes, which also have military applications, including to bind captives. Lastly, it has been proposed that the oval shaped objects attached to the backs of certain men are backpacks, meant to extend the range of hunting in the desert; they would be essential equipment for an expeditionary force as well. The ostentatious display of weapons may have been intended to show off the varied arsenal at the disposal of the group. Virtually all the men menacingly brandish maces, double-ended axes or throw sticks as though prepared to smite enemies. Perhaps most indicative of the intent to display weapons are the several archers who hold a bow in one hand and a mace in the other; ruling out the possibility of a bow shot.

The Hunters’ Palette has been interpreted using the ideas of Kemp and Baines, namely that “the hunting and domination of wild animals probably symbolizes the maintenance of order and the containment of disorder.” These ideas are reflected in the probably earlier iconography of the Hierakonpolis (Two Dog Cities) Palette at the Cairo Museum (JE27434) that he interprets as fortified towns being attacked by animals symbolizing the monarchy. The Battlefield Palette (British Museum (EA 20791)) also depicts scenes of human conflict. It has been proposed that the Gebel Tjauti Rock Inscription commemorates a military operation by Abydos in the early part of Naqada III, possibly against a target in the region of Naqada. See Friedman and Hendrickx, “Gebel Tjauti Rock Inscription 1,” 17. Kemp has considered the political-military environment in which proto-states functioned, observing that the more successful “incipient city states had become engaged in more organized conflicts over territory.”

146 Kemp, Ancient Egypt, 96–97. Kemp has pointed to documents depicting conflicts involving walled settlements. One of these is the Cene (Tchenu) Palette at the Cairo Museum (JE27434) that he interprets as fortified towns being attacked by animals symbolizing the monarchy. The Battlefield Palette (British Museum (EA 20791)) also depicts scenes of human conflict. It has been proposed that the Gebel Tjauti Rock Inscription commemorates a military operation by Abydos in the early part of Naqada III, possibly against a target in the region of Naqada. See Friedman and Hendrickx, “Gebel Tjauti Rock Inscription 1,” 17.
147 Cialowicz has questioned the types of weapons portrayed: “the heavy equipment of the hunters is of little use hunting herbivores.”
148 Cialowicz, “Les palettes Égyptiennes aux motifs zoomorphes et sans décorations,” 67. Except for the lions, live animals are portrayed in the center of the palette, implying capture by lasso and other non-lethal means, possibly by nets that are not shown.
149 In a hunting mode, maces may have been used to stun netted creatures to bring them under control.
151 Elements of the scene—the uniformity of the dress, the orderliness of the men, the display of weapons, and other features remind the author of modern, national day military parades favored by some countries. The display of military might was a key objective.
152 Kemp, Ancient Egypt, 92–97.
153 The portrayal of men with two weapons may stylistically hint at ancient fighting techniques. After a man had shot all his arrows, or thrown his spear, his mace, or throw stick (either initially hung from the waist) would become the primary weapon. Enemies at some distance may have been attacked first with throw sticks, spears coming into play in closer fighting. (No daggers are portrayed on the palette but they may have been carried as well.) The host of differentiated weapons suggests multiple combat scenarios.
Palette where two hunting dogs frame varied creatures, thereby symbolizing the “containment of unrule in the universe.”\(^{156}\) Similarly, Hendrickx explains the canines on that palette as symbolizing the control of the chaotic forces represented by the encircled desert animals.\(^{157}\) These ideas also play a role in the interpretation of the Hunters’ Palette, the flanking dogs on the Two Dog (and Four Dog) palette having been replaced by two rows of hunters who drive a file of animals forward.\(^{158}\) The Hunters’ palette is also thought to express the significance of hunting in predynastic society. In the scene, returning elite hunters display captured animals and weapons, reinforcing their prestigious status. Their return is likely followed by the slaughter of the game and feasting by the elite that has ritualistic overtones.\(^{159}\)

Kemp has noted that military conflict is among the sources of disorder in the late predynastic period.\(^{160}\) The incorporation of a military theme in the Hunters’ Palette—the demonstration of military might and the preparedness to respond to threats—may have been a response to more frequent conflict, or an actual existential threat to the proto-kingdom. In the context of ancient beliefs, the palette may have been intended to magically intimidate enemies, if not actually defeat them. The above multiple interpretations of the Hunters’ Palette would seem compatible and complementary. However, taking note of its predominant share of the palette’s surface, the demonstration military power may have been the principal message. The apotropaic connotations that the double bull appears to have evoked raises the question whether the Hunters’ Palette itself was considered an amuletic device in its time. As noted above, one interpretation of the palette centers on hunting and its social/political role. However, hunting could be a dangerous activity, an issue that has been raised by several authors. Patch has suggested that the hazards may be symbolized on the palette by the hunter who has fallen victim to a lion. Perhaps not always fully appreciated is the potentially great personal risk implicit in the apparent practice of capturing animals alive. Even if the hunted quarry were bovidae (as opposed to ferocious, predatory animals), the hooves and horns of panicked, netted or lassoed, creatures could cause considerable harm, if not death. Periodic hippopotamus and crocodile hunts posed equal, if not greater dangers (although the objectives of these encounters were different, and these beasts are not represented on the Hunters’ Palette). Undoubtedly, the horrors of military conflict were well understood by fighting men and were of equal, if not of greater concern. In each of these circumstances, whatever the particular challenges, it would seem likely that elite hunters or troop leaders—they probably were the same individuals—would have sought the protection of the supernatural, for example, through the enactment of pre-hunt or pre-combat rituals. As a part of these rites, the perceived powers of the Hunters’ Palette may have been evoked, with the joint double bull-shrine possibly playing some role.

\(^{156}\) Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 93–94, fig. 31.


\(^{159}\) Hendrickx also draws attention to the close relationship between military/political power and hunting in the Naqadian culture, the hunt promoting skill with weapons and cooperation between men.

\(^{160}\) Kemp, *Ancient Egypt*, 96.