

# ΠΟΤΑΜΙΚΟΝ

## SINEWS OF ACHELOIOS

A COMPREHENSIVE CATALOG OF  
THE BRONZE COINAGE OF THE MAN-FACED BULL,  
WITH ESSAYS ON ORIGIN AND IDENTITY

Written and edited by

**Nicholas J. Molinari**

and

**Nicola Sisci**

ARCHAEPRESS ARCHAEOLOGY

# ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD

Gordon House  
276 Banbury Road  
Oxford OX2 7ED

[www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

ISBN 978 1 78491 401 1  
ISBN 978 1 78491 402 8 (e-Pdf)

© Archaeopress and the authors 2016

Cover illustration: Bronze litra of Herbessos, c. 338 to 336 BC, depicting Achelios Herbessos as a man-faced bull (Image courtesy of Classical Numismatic Group, Inc., Lancaster, PA and London, England; Background image features a segment of the Black Sea, courtesy of NASA).

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright owners.

Printed in England by  
This book is available direct from Archaeopress or from our website [www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

...τῶν λαμπρῶν πηκτῶν τε ἐν γένος ὑδάτων χαλκὸς συσταθεὶς γέγονεν

...this particular kind of the bright and solid waters, being compounded thus, is termed 'bronze.'

Plato, *Timaeus*, 59c (W.R.M. Lamb translation)



# Contents

<b>Preface</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Introduction: Why the Man-Faced Bull?</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>Part I: Concerning the Origin and Identity of the Man-Faced Bull</b> .....	<b>ix</b>
<b>Section One: On the Origin of Man-Faced Bull Iconography</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Chapter I: Paleolithic Art-Iron Age .....	1
Paleolithic Art .....	1
Cattle Cults.....	2
Neolithic Art .....	3
The Near East and Levant.....	5
Preliminary Conclusions: Near East .....	14
Egypt .....	15
India .....	16
Chapter II: The Westward Migrations of Man-Faced Bull Iconography .....	17
Introduction.....	17
Cyprus .....	17
Iron Age Seer-Healers .....	22
Mercenaries.....	25
Conclusions.....	30
Chapter III: The Iconography and Related Traditions in Early Western Mediterranean Cultures .....	31
Introduction.....	31
Sicilian Traditions in Relation to Water Cults and the Man-Faced Bull.....	32
Traditions of Sardinia.....	36
Early Italic Traditions .....	42
Etruscan Man-Faced Bulls.....	48
Chapter IV: The Etruscan and Greek Worlds .....	48
The Greek Man-Faced Bull .....	55
Conclusions.....	68
Chapter V: Distribution of the Iconography on Greek Coinage.....	69
Eastern Mediterranean Man-Faced Bull Types.....	69
Mainland Greece Man-Faced Bull Types .....	71
Western Mediterranean Man-Faced Bull Types.....	72
<b>Section Two: On the Identity of the Man-Faced Bull</b> .....	<b>79</b>
Chapter VI: Past Arguments for the Identity of the Man-Faced Bull .....	79
Minotaur.....	79
The Agricultural Allegory .....	80
Neptune .....	80
Jupiter.....	81
Dionysos .....	81
Local River Gods .....	83
Acheloios .....	88
Intermediary Conclusions .....	90
On Greek Epithets.....	91
Chapter VII: The Identity of the Greek Man-Faced Bull.....	91
The Greek Man-Faced Bulls, Epithets of Acheloios .....	92
Notes on Ancestry and Etymology .....	93
Conclusions.....	95
Concluding Reflections on the Man-Faced Bull.....	97
Plates for Part I.....	100
<b>Plates</b> .....	<b>101</b>

<b>Part II: Catalog of the Bronze Coinage of the Man-Faced Bull.....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Section Three: SICILY .....</b>	<b>121</b>
ABAKAINON .....	122
AGYRION .....	124
ALAISA ARCHONIDEA (unconfirmed).....	129
ALAISA KATANE .....	131
ALONTION.....	132
ASSOROS.....	134
GELA.....	135
HALYKIAI (ALICIE).....	136
HERBESSOS .....	139
IAITAS.....	141
KATANE.....	144
KERSINI.....	146
MAMAR.....	147
MYLAI (?).....	149
PANORMOS.....	150
SERGETAIANS.....	153
SILERAIANS .....	154
UNCERTAIN: SILERAIANS?.....	156
TAUROMENION .....	157
<b>Section Four: ITALY .....</b>	<b>160</b>
AESERNIA.....	161
THE BRETTII .....	165
CALES.....	167
COMPULTERIA.....	188
IRNTHI.....	191
LARINUM.....	196
MALIES.....	197
METAPONTION .....	199
NEAPOLIS .....	200
NOLA.....	247
‘ROME’.....	249
SUESSA AURUNCA.....	254
TEANUM SIDICINUM .....	258
TIATI APULORUM .....	263
VENAFRUM .....	265
<b>Section Five Akarnania .....</b>	<b>267</b>
AKARNANIAN FEDERATION.....	269
LEUKAS.....	273
THE OINIADAI .....	275
STRATOS .....	278
THYRREION .....	280
<b>Section Six: Remaining Mints.....</b>	<b>281</b>
AMBRAKIA .....	282
ISTROS (Black Sea).....	284
METHYLION? (Thessaly).....	286
METROPOLIS (Thessaly).....	287
TARSOS.....	289
AI KHANOUM? (Seleukid Kings) .....	290
IONIA: UNCERTAIN MINT ON THE MEANDER RIVER .....	291
<b>Appendix 1 .....</b>	<b>292</b>
Joseph Eckhel, ‘De tauro cum facie humana,’ in <i>Doctrina Numorum Veterum</i> , Vol. 1 (Wien: Ignatius Alberti, 1792). Translated by Curtis Clay, 2013.	

<b>Appendix 2</b> .....	<b>299</b>
‘The Oxus River God: a man-faced Indian humped bull’	
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>304</b>
<b>Index</b> .....	<b>347</b>

## Preface

Originally, the primary goal of *Potamikon* was to catalog every known variety of ancient bronze coinage featuring a man-faced bull. But it quickly became much more than a catalog of coins, particularly when we could not find a clear answer as to the identity of the man-faced bull. So we did some investigating, and as the layers unraveled and more and more interesting things emerged, we soon found ourselves peering down a very deep rabbit hole. It turned out that, in order to really understand the identity of the man-faced bull, we'd also have to investigate the origin of the iconography. Against our better judgment, and prompted by the enthusiasm of some early contributors (especially David Macdonald and Shannon Glasheen Brock), we decided to jump in, and the book became an investigation into the origin and identity of the man-faced bull, as well as a catalog of coins. This seems fitting, since now the factual data of the catalog is balanced by the theoretical essays of the text. Ultimately, the outpouring of support from an older generation of scholars has been tremendous, and the quality of this book is to a great extent the result of the assistance of others. But the controversial suggestions in this book are all our own (as are any mistakes), and the inclusion of the names of various scholars that we thank at the end of the preface does not indicate that they accept or endorse the content of this book.

Part I of the book examines the origin and identity of the man-faced bull. It will help if we conceptualize this part of the project by borrowing a metaphor employed by Descartes (and later Heidegger): The roots of the man-faced bull tradition, deeply embedded in the human psyche, are in Old European culture, c. 5th Millennium BC. The tiniest tendrils of these roots reach back much deeper into the mixanthropic cave art of Paleolithic times, tens of thousands of years earlier. The trunk of the tree, emerging from the roots, is in the Near-East and also Cyprus. Here the iconography and surrounding mythology are appropriated for a number of uses over thousands of years, each adding a new ring to the tree. At the top of the trunks we have the branches: to India, Egypt, Anatolia, and the western Mediterranean areas of Sicily, Sardinia, and Italy. Each of these branches in turn separates into further branches (like the Hittites, Etruscans, Oscans, Greeks, and others), some of which we follow very closely in Part II of this book. The bronze coinage of the man-faced bull, which this book catalogs, is only a very small part of a truly massive tree.

Part II of the book contains the catalog, which is arranged geographically, then alphabetically, then chronologically. We begin with Sicily and then move to Italy, followed by Akarnania, and then finally we cover the remaining issues, all of which are east of Magna Graecia. Since bronze coinage of the man-faced bull appeared first in Sicily, we decided to start there and then move north and then east. Catalog entries provide denomination, dating, a picture of the coin, obverse and reverse description, weight and diameter (when available), and additional references. Occasionally, a picture or line drawing was not available, and in such cases we digitally modified illustrations that originally appeared in Goltzius' *Sicilia et Magna Graecia, sive, Historiae vrbivm et popvlorvm Graeciae ex antiqvis nomismatibvs* (1644), or similar works. When citing a coin from this book in a section other than its own, we use the following format: The 16th coin listed in the catalog would be listed as MSP I, 16, an abbreviation of 'Molinari Sisci Potamikon, Vol. 1, No. 16'. Most other notes and references throughout the document are in accordance with the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15th Edition.

The appendix offers the following: First, Curtis Clay's translation of Joseph Eckhel's '*De tauro cum facie humana*,' which he very generously produced for the Potamikon Project. Second, we include Dr. Lloyd W. Taylor's essay on the Indian humped man-faced bull appearing on rare Seleukid bronzes. We end with an extensive bibliography of the sources consulted during the research and writing of this book and general index that includes numismatic devices.

In closing, we would like to thank the following individuals for their contributions to the Potamikon Project:

Shannon Glasheen Brock, Alberto Campana, David MacDonald, N. Keith Rutter, Marina Taliercio-Mensitieri, Rabun Taylor, Vincenzo La Rosa, Massimo Cultraro, Curtis Clay, Alessandro Calciati, Hans-Peter Isler, Angela Rosciano, Frank Hole, Luigi Graziano, Maria Caccamo Caltabiano, Lloyd Taylor, Orazio La Delfa, Alan Walker, Renate M. van Dijk, Andrew Burnett, Andrew McCabe, David Sear, Oliver Hoover, Klaus Vondrovec, M.H. Crawford, Suzanne Frey-Kupper, Maurizio Riguzzi, Brian Kritt, Michel Amandry, J.M. Kenoyer, Jean Donohoe, Massimiliano Bertelli, J.D. Bateson, Richard Abdy, Paolo Nebiolo, Enrico Giovannelli, Alessandro Di Ludovico, Giorgia Gargano, Giacomo Benati, Davide Nadali, Pietro Maria Militello, Luca Girella, Mario Nassa, Maurizia Lucchino, Larissa Bonfante, Francesco Camia, Enrico Giannitrapani, Evangelina Markou, Noemi Ghetti, Andrew Shapland, Chrysanthi Gallou, Anita Crispino, Madame Zerkane of the BnF, Bruno Lambert, John Gomer, August Oberti, Joseph Sermarini and our friends on the Forum Classical Numismatic Discussion Board, specifically: Peter Hope, Hans-Joachim Hoef, John Francisco, Martin Rowe, Michael Davis, Mark Fox, Shawn Caza, Jay Grande, Patricia Lawrence, Andreas



Reich, Barry Murphy, Lars Rutten, and Pekka Kemppinen, the Massachusetts Library System Resource Sharing Team, especially Jenn Del Cegno, the Resource Sharing Team of the National Library in Turin, especially Franco Bergamasco, Luisa Szauber, Maria Panucci, Monica Vivolo, Gabriella Ghiano, and Antonella Minotillo, our friends on Lamoneta, the Dallas Museum of Art, the Town of Milford, Massachusetts and the faculty and students of Milford High School, especially Daniel Nelson, Ben Liberto, and Michael A. Molinari. And, finally, a special thanks to our publisher: Archaeopress of Oxford, and especially David Davison, for seeing the importance of our book and assisting us throughout its production.

We would also like to thank the following numismatic firms and museums, all of whom allowed use of images, and without whom we would have no book: Classical Numismatic Group, and especially Dale Tatro and Travis Markel; Numismatik Lanz; Numismatica Ars Classica; Gitbud & Naumann and Numismatik Naumann; HD Rauch; Munzen & Medaillen (GmbH); Fritz Rudolf Künker; ArtCoins Roma; AH Baldwin and Sons; Dix Noonan Webb; Auctiones; Gerhard Hirsch Nachfolger; Forvm Ancient Coins; Jean Elsen & ses fils; London Ancient Coins; Nomos AG; Roma Numismatics; Spink and Son; Bibliothèque nationale de France, département des Monnaies, médailles et antiques; the Trustees of the British Museum and the British Museum Department of Coins and Medals.

This book is dedicated to Kate and Pamela, two incredibly patient and supportive women who allowed us to spend many hours fixated on man-faced bulls, when we should have been fixated on them.

Nicholas Molinari & Nicola Sisci



# Why the Man-Faced Bull?: A Philosophical Introduction

When the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami killed 228,000 people on the coast of Indonesia and the surrounding area, people were reminded of the power of nature, particularly water.<sup>1</sup> Within one day, an entire region was fundamentally changed: entire communities were utterly destroyed, the infrastructure suffered billions of dollars worth of damage, and, perhaps worst of all, families that had existed there for many generations were swept away without a trace. Such experiences are a brutal reminder of the overwhelming power of nature to take away life at a moment's notice, leaving in its wake a brief experience of stark reality.

But there is another, more pleasant side to the coin. Nature gives just as it takes away. Approximately 350,000 people are born each day across the globe.<sup>2</sup> The population is now over seven billion. And that is just human beings. Billions of examples of new life sprout up every instant, from the tiniest single-celled organisms to the largest sea creatures; life is emerging all around us. And who is to say what lies outside of the known universe? Just recently scientists using data from the Kepler telescope estimated that 8.8 billion potentially habitable planets exist in the galaxy.<sup>3</sup> Such numbers are essentially unfathomable, but the point is that nature is literally bursting with life.

Ancient humans faced wild nature on a daily basis, and they were much more actively engaged participants in its unfolding than we are today. They didn't have much of a choice. If not seeking food, they were making sure not to become food. They sought shelter when the gods were angry and rejoiced when they were generous. Humans had to work the earth, or scour it, in order to sustain life. But there was always more to human experience than instinctual responses to external stimuli. It was never just eating, sleeping, and procreating. Human beings paid tribute to the principles of life. They made fertility idols and sketched imitations of nature on the walls of caves. They held festivals that celebrated nature's benefits and participated in somber ceremonies in recognition that it can all be taken away. But ultimately, as part of nature, human beings represent its consciousness. Human experience is the self-reflecting principle of nature in the same way that individual consciousness is the self-reflecting element of the human body, and this has been evident since the very first examples of prehistoric art.

<sup>1</sup> USGS, 'Magnitude 9.1 – Off the West Coast of Northern Sumatra,' in *U.S. Geological Survey* (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> World Health Organization, '50 Facts: Global health situation and trends 1955-2025,' in *World Health Report* (1998).

<sup>3</sup> C. Moskowitz, 'Kepler Telescope Finds Plethora of Earth-Size Planets,' in *Scientific American* (November 2013).

So, at the outset of this work, we ask ourselves: Why the man-faced bull? Why did the ancients find a bull with a human face so appealing? What is it about this iconography that is significant, both to ancient people and to human beings today?

The man-faced bull's significance is grounded in the fact that it best captures the intimate strife at the heart of the relation of nature and man.<sup>4</sup> It is an image that captures two essential things: on the one hand, it represents the wild and unpredictable, though fertile and life-giving qualities of nature as depicted through the bull. Ultimately, the bull represents relentless, bare nature. On the other hand, the addition of a human face captures the intelligibility projected upon nature that man executes as a fundamental part of his existence. Mankind offers to nature a level of consciousness and in doing so, we are able to exert ourselves upon it in the same fashion that it exerts itself upon us: Relentlessly, in a dynamic interplay of reciprocal exertion. The image of a bull with a man's face conveys this basic characteristic that exists between nature and man, and for the authors of this work, no image in the ancient or modern world does a better job.

This book, in a sense, is a tribute to ancient man and his devotion to the man-faced bull. But it is also a tribute to the man-faced bull himself, and to what he represents. Of all the ancient gods it is the man-faced bull that is closest to us. He is not some distant figure making decisions about our fate, or some detached principle of cause and effect. He represents us and our surroundings, and the sacredness of both as one magnificent phenomenon.<sup>5</sup> Apparently, some of the ancient Greeks recognized the particular significance of this image, too, as we see in **Fig.1**, which depicts the Greek pantheon surrounding our beloved man-faced bull, whose head sits on an altar.<sup>6</sup> And in Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which we get a glimpse of Plato's over-arching view of man in relation to the cos-

<sup>4</sup> See below, pg. 27-8 for an examination of Empedocles of Akragas and his association with the man-faced bull. Empedocles believed two underlying forces governed nature, Love and Strife, and he is the only ancient Greek author to mention the man-faced bull in descriptive terms, as βουγενῆ ἀνδρόπρωρα (Fr. 61, Aelian *Nat. anim.* XVI, 29).

<sup>5</sup> As Jacques Cauvin observes, 'an animal species can be integrated into the bestiary of symbolism of a culture only in so far as, in some manner, the culture recognizes something of itself in the animal and projects on to it some subliminal dimension of its collective psychology' (J. Cauvin, *The Birth of the Gods and the Origins of Agriculture*, translated by Trevor Watkins (Cambridge UP, 2000), 123).

<sup>6</sup> Greek, c. 370 BC, Pergamon Museum, Berlin.

mos, the dialogue takes place in the most appropriate of places, a shrine to Acheloios<sup>7</sup> on the banks of a river.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately, it is our belief that the man-faced bull is much more than a clever depiction of a river-god. On coinage alone the image is remarkably widespread, and the meanings attached to this image, as we will soon see, are varied yet thoroughly interwoven.<sup>9</sup> Sometimes he appears in tombs, deep underground, mediating between two worlds. Sometimes he appears on coinage, triumphantly standing while being crowned by nymphs. In some traditions, he is said to be a protector of children, while in others, he is a fearsome creature subdued by the might of Herakles. Whatever the custom, since his beginning some 7,000 years ago in Neolithic agricultural communities, he has been worshiped by millions of people for thousands of years. But in the end, he is always intimately related to water, and as water he is part of us.<sup>10</sup> For the man-faced bull is the god of water and as such, as Thales<sup>11</sup> attested, the originating, underlying, and final principle of all things.

---

<sup>7</sup> There are many different orthographic representations for Acheloios. Throughout this text we will use ‘Acheloios,’ as it is closest to Homer and Hesiod’s Ἀχελώϊος, whereas ‘Achelous’ is the Latin version of Ἀχελώϊος, a later term employed by Plato, Apollodorus, Euripides, Herodotus, Thucydides, Plutarch, Pausanias, and others.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, and H.N. Fowler, *Plato: Phaedrus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 230c.

<sup>9</sup> Rabun Taylor puts it best: ‘Water- particularly in its earthbound, chthonic manifestations- carries powerful intimations of fertility and increase. The same element can be a force of death and destruction. Its symbolism is interesting precisely because it is binary. Water is life and death. It nurtures and it kills; it strengthens and it enfeebles’ (R. Taylor, ‘River Raptures: Containment and Control of Water in Greek and Roman Constructions of Identity,’ in *The Nature and Function of Water, Baths, Bathing, and Hygiene from Antiquity through the Renaissance*, edited by Cynthia Kosso and Anne Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 21-22).

<sup>10</sup> About 60% of the average human body is composed of water.

<sup>11</sup> Thales of Miletus (c. 7th century BC) posited the notion that everything existing in the world comes from water, the governing origin of nature: ‘Θαλῆς μὲν ὁ τῆς τοιαύτης ἀρχηγὸς φιλοσοφίας ὕδωρ φησὶν εἶναι’ (H. Diels, and W. Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (Berlin: Weidmann, 1952), 11 A 12=Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 983b). Aristotle uses ὕδωρ, not Ἀχελώϊος, but the entire account is very much second-hand, relying on Aristotle’s assumption that Thales’ philosophy involved the dynamics of moisture, ὑγρός. L. Posteraro saw the origins of this philosophy already appearing in Homeric epic, in which many heroes of the Trojan War are sons of rivers, and, upon dying, return to the rivers (L. Posteraro, ‘Origine di Alife. Simbolismo delle sue tradizioni e della sua moneta,’ in *R.I.N.* (1916), 318).