

## SIRENS AS SOUL BEARERS ON LYCIAN GRAVE RELIEFS IN THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

### KLASİK DÖNEM LİKYA MEZAR KABARTMALARINDA RUH TAŞIYICI OLARAK SİRENLER

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**Abstract:** The subject matter of this paper consists of the iconographic roots of the human-headed, bird-bodied figures that appear on some of the Lycian grave reliefs in the Classical Period. In total there are five human-headed bird-bodied figures on two monuments standing in the acropolis of Xanthos. One is “*Building I*”, the other is the pillar tomb termed the “*Harpy*” Monument. Researchers have connected these human-headed bird-bodied figures with the descriptions of Sirens that are recorded in Greek Mythology. According to the accepted understanding today, the figure depicting the Siren was transported from eastern art to the shores of the western Aegean, a consequence of the increasing maritime-trade relationship of Mediterranean and Aegean peoples. However, neither the root nor the religious affiliations of this image that is found in Lycian tomb depictions have been examined in detail in studies concerning Sirens. This paper examines the origin of the “Lycian Sirens” and their status within the Lycian and Anatolian spiritual belief system, regarding both literary and archaeological evidence; with the aim of elucidating the presently obscure belief in the otherworld of the Lycian people.

**Keywords:** Lycia • Siren • Classical Period • Grave Reliefs.

**Özet:** Çalışmamızın konusunu Likya Klasik Dönem mezar kabartmaları üzerinde karşımıza çıkan insan başlı-kuş gövdeli figürlerin ikonografik kökeni oluşturmaktadır. Ksanthos kenti akropolünde yer alan iki anıt üzerinde toplam beş adet insan başlı-kuş gövdeli figür bulunmaktadır. Bunlardan birisi *F Anıtı*, diğeri ise *Harpy Anıtı* olarak adlandırılan dikme mezardır. Araştırmacılar bu insan başlı-kuş gövdeli figürleri Hellen mitoslarındaki Siren adlandırmalarıyla özdeşleştirilmişlerdir. Tekil olarak sirenleri irdeleyen çalışmaların kabul edilen görüşlerince, Siren figürü Ege ve Akdeniz halklarının, denizcilik vasıtasıyla artan ticari ilişkilerinden dolayı doğu sanatından Ege'nin batı kıyısına taşınmıştır. Ancak Likya mezar kabartmalarında da karşımıza çıkan bu motifin inanç sistemindeki yeri ve kökeni ayrıntılıca irdelenmemiştir. Bu bağlamda bu çalışmayla figürün kökeni, Likya ve Anadolu inanç sistemindeki yeri, antik kaynak ve arkeolojik veriler ışığında irdelenecek, aynı zamanda bilinmezlerle dolu Likya'nın öte dünya inancına da ışık tutulmaya çalışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Lykia • Siren • Klasik Dönem • Mezar Kabartması

The depictions forming the basis of this study are on the famous “*Harpy*” pillar tomb which is situated in the north of the Xanthos acropolis. The chamber tomb surrounded by figured reliefs sits upon a single rectangle block 2. 30 cm. wide and 5. 43 cm. high, the platform being 1. 40 cm. high, with a total height of 8. 60 cm. The reliefs on this tomb, discovered by C. Fellows in 1838 were removed and taken to British Museum. The reliefs on this monument were first introduced to the scientific world by A. H. Smith<sup>1</sup> and F. N. Pryce<sup>2</sup> (fig.1-4). Later the meanings carried by these reliefs

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<sup>1</sup> Smith 1892, 54 no. 94.

<sup>2</sup> Pryce 1928, 122.



Fig. 1. Xanthos "Harpy" Tomb. West Side



Fig. 2. Xanthos "Harpy" Tomb. South Side



Fig. 3. Xanthos "Harpy" Tomb. North Side



Fig. 4. Xanthos "Harpy" Tomb. East Side

were elaborated upon in various publications but no one could arrive at a consensus. Some of the determinant elements of the iconography of this monument, usually dated to the first quarter of V century B.C., to between 500 and 480 B.C.<sup>3</sup>, were evaluated in addition to the main composition in this study, through fresh observations and the attempt is made to provide a meaning for these figures.

On the west side of the monument the figures of two women facing each other, both sitting on ornate thrones at each corner are depicted. In front of the enthroned woman on the left is the gap of a grave door, upon which a cow suckling the figure of a calf is carved. In the middle there are three maidens with various offerings in their hands, moving towards the enthroned figure seated on the right. In the center of the east side there is a seated man with a long-beard and opposite him there is a small figure offering a rooster. Behind the seated man are two attendants and behind the small figure offering a rooster is the depiction of a man standing with his dog.

On both sides of the main figures in the centre of each of the carved relief panels facing South and North there is the figure of a human-headed bird; depicted in profile, each with an egg-like body (fig. 5). These human-headed bird figures resemble birds, with their wings, tails and feet, and humans in their head, body and arms. The arms, covered to the elbow with the clothes, are depicted as muscled. All four of these hybrid creatures are depicted as flying beyond the relief panels, carry in their arms small sized people. These creatures diverge from each other in many details such as the size of their bodies and the style of depiction, style of hair and feet and the way that they hold the figures they are carrying.

Another example related to our subject is "Building F" also located on the Xanthos acropolis<sup>4</sup> (fig. 6). On the uppermost part of this monumental tomb construction, there are two figures sitting facing each other<sup>5</sup>, and in the middle between them, there is the figure of a human-headed bird

<sup>3</sup> Pryce 1928, 124; Demargne 1958, 45; Berger 1970, 128; Shahbazi 1975, 49; Keen 1992, 59, 63; Işık 1998, 15; Rudolph 2003, 60; Özüdoğru 2009, 146 f, 150.

<sup>4</sup> Bruns – Özgan 1987, 29 cat. M6, pl. 3, 2.

<sup>5</sup> This composition is regarded as a "Lycian motif" on the east pediment of the Nereid Monument, see, Childs – Demargne 1989, 293 pl. 140- 141; Bruns –Özgan 1987, 29. These figures on the "F" Monument are accepted as a couple.



Fig. 5. Xanthos "Harpy" Tomb. Sirens

standing on an Ionic column. The carving of the head of this creature has been damaged but apparently depicted a bird from the feet, tail, wings and lower part of its body and with the form of a human for the upper part of its body. Parallel to the human-like arms depicted frontally; the wings at the back are open to the sides. It wears a khiton with a belt, the arms of the khiton reach to the elbows and it encloses the upper part of the body. The monument was discovered by C. Fellows, as was the "Harpy" monument, and it was brought to the British Museum in 1838. Researchers have dated this monument to later than the "Harpy" tomb<sup>6</sup>.

These depictions of human-headed birds discovered in Xanthos city and found on both of these monuments are termed in Greek mythology, 'Siren'. Studies conducted to date show the origin of this hybrid creature was in the East and that it was brought westwards through the influence of Oriental art<sup>7</sup> with these human-headed birds known through close commercial relations with the East in the first quarter of the first millennium B.C., and began to be found frequently depicted on Greek vase paintings from this period onwards. Although the origin of this figure is recognized in its depiction, its place within the belief concerning death and its mythological background was not made explicit.

What is the place of these creatures that are known to have been brought into Occidental art from the Orient, in respect to belief concerning death and which are first encountered carved on Classical Period Lycian tomb reliefs, with the mission of soul carriers, and upon the basis of which culture? In this context; the history of birds and bird-like creatures related to death and the underworld needs investigation.

The concept of death doubtless had an important place in the religious belief systems of ancient communities. Due to the visual and written evidence surviving today, we have information concerning the thoughts of ancient societies on this subject and, in particular, during this period, Mesopotamian and Egyptian and subsequently Hittite and Greek cultures provide important information concerning this subject.

In Ancient Egyptian belief the human-headed bird is observed associated with the concept of death, with Ba representing the soul. Ba, which is described as a human-headed bird<sup>8</sup> is seen as the

<sup>6</sup> Pryce 1928, 131; Bruns – Özgan 1987, 29.

<sup>7</sup> For sirens in generally see Weicker 1902; Buschor 1944, 14 ff; Temür 2009, 174-178.

<sup>8</sup> Buschor 1944, 13-14; Champdor 1991, 73; Marie – Hagen 2005, 164.

representative of the soul which leaves the body at will and then returns to it. This figure, known from its mention in the Book of the Dead is also known from its depictions in Egyptian wall paintings and reliefs<sup>9</sup> (fig. 7).



Fig. 6. Xanthos "F" Monument

These depictions of birds and human-headed birds are also found in Mesopotamian art and mythology. One of these mythological figures is called Zu and Zu is depicted on Akkadian cylinder seals in the form of human-headed bird<sup>10</sup> (fig. 8). Zu, who is accepted as one of the secondary gods, is also thought to have been a god of underworld<sup>11</sup>. Another important depiction found in Mesopotamian beliefs related to birds is known from the epic of Gilgamesh. Travelling to the other world is described as such in the part of this epic that is called as "Enkidu's Dream"<sup>12</sup>;

*"The sky was roaring, the earth was moaning. I was all alone.*

*An animal with a waterfowl-like face, eagle-like feet rushed forward to me.*

*My arms were feathered like bird wings.*

*It looked into my face and brought me to the dark house of Irkalla, the underground goddess.*

*There was no way back from that road.*

*Settlers of that house ate dust and mud, rested in the dark.*

*They had clothes from wings just like birds".*

Although the text has been interpreted differently by different researchers<sup>13</sup>; it is obvious that people were brought to the other world by birds and that the deceased were understood to be transformed into birds. Another composition which is not directly related to death but is carved on the cylinder seals as a mythological character was the myth of "Etana and Eagle"<sup>14</sup>. In these depictions, Etana is pictured ascending into the sky in the embrace of an eagle and this depiction is regarded as depicting Etana travelling into the presence of the gods<sup>15</sup> (fig. 9).

Human-headed birds described as Ba in Egypt and Zu in Mesopotamia are not found to date in Hittite art and belief<sup>16</sup>. Contrary to this, bird and bird-like human depictions are found particularly

<sup>9</sup> For the Egyptian Book of the Dead see: Champdor 1991, 73; for the wall paintings see: Buschor 1944, 12 fig. 1; Marie – Hagen 2005, 164-165.

<sup>10</sup> Hooke 1993, 91, 12b.

<sup>11</sup> Hooke 1993, 62-63.

<sup>12</sup> Çiğ 2009, 46.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson 2008; Çiğ 2009; Gezgin 2009, 1-2.

<sup>14</sup> Goldenberg 1973, 91 fig. 264; Moortgart 1982, 99 fig. 233; Hooke 1993, 91, 12a.

<sup>15</sup> Hooke 1993, 61-62.

<sup>16</sup> The only human headed bird depiction from Asia Minor dating from before the Hittite Period is on a seal from Alişar, dated to the Assyrian Trade Colonies Period, and this example has been identified as being the same as Mesopotamian figure of Zu. See: Alparslan 1995, 45, pl. 33c fn., 100.



Fig. 7. Egyptian Wall Painting. Thebes



Fig. 8. "Zu" Depiction on Cylinder Seal. Akkadian



Fig. 9. "Etanna and Eagle" Motif on Cylinder Seal

in spiritual depictions<sup>17</sup>. Another noteworthy characteristic of Hittite belief is a “bird’s” position in relation to death and the underworld<sup>18</sup>. In Hittite records it is asserted that the God of Storm thinks only birds worthy to offer to the underworld gods<sup>19</sup>; and it is known from Hittite funeral texts that birds are sacrificed at the funerals of kings and queens<sup>20</sup>. F. Sevinç draws attention to the point that birds may have been perceived as creatures that can fly in the underworld with their excellent wings and relates the existence of wings in depiction of some of the underground gods to this understanding<sup>21</sup>.



Fig. 10. Hittite Ishtar from Karahöyük

That depictions of Ishtar are winged in Hittite art (fig. 10-11), as are the Mesopotamian examples (fig. 12) of importance within the scope of this subject<sup>22</sup>, as it is known that in Mesopotamian mythology the Goddess Ishtar has gone below into the land of dead and then returned to the earth again<sup>23</sup>. It is known that the Hittites were influenced by their south-western neighbour Mesopotamia and especially by the Hurrians<sup>24</sup>. Therefore it is a generally accepted that some of the gods and belief systems of the Hittites were adopted directly from Mesopotamia and via the Hurrians<sup>25</sup> and, consequently, the similarity in belief systems of the Hittites and the Hurrians with the Mesopotamians is not surprising.

In the Greek belief system, as well as in the three great Eastern cultures, birds and human-headed birds are encountered in connection with death. In Greek thought, the spirit was regarded as a flying, winged asset<sup>26</sup>, believed to pass out from the mouth in the form of a bird while dying<sup>27</sup> and in this respect, this close

resemblance between the Greek and Egyptian belief systems is evident.

Human-headed birds, the basis of our subject were also commonly depicted in Greek art and described as *Seirenes*<sup>28</sup>. In Greek mythology it is understood that sirens are the daughters of the river god Akheloos, their mother is a Muse and that they are two, three or four sisters<sup>29</sup>. Depictions

<sup>17</sup> Alparslan 1995, 63- 64, 74-77 pl. 57b-c, pl. 61c, 62c.

<sup>18</sup> Sevinç 2007, 123-125 fn. 497.

<sup>19</sup> Sevinç 2007, 262, 281.

<sup>20</sup> For the sacrifice of birds in general see Haas 1994, 658-61. For sacrifice rituals mentioned in Hittite funeral texts see: Sevinç 2007, 115-127.

<sup>21</sup> Sevinç 2007, 76. Especially the goddess named in Sumerian as Inanna, in Akkadian and Hittites as Ishtar and in Hurrian as Shaushka, known from myths of going to the underworld, depicted on a plaque today in the British Museum with bird’s feet and winged, supports this thesis of Sevinç.

<sup>22</sup> Sevinç 2007, 328-329, pls. 40-41.

<sup>23</sup> For Ishtar see Hooke 1993, 40-42; Kramer 2001, 153-172; Black – Gren 2003, 112-115.

<sup>24</sup> For Hittite religion see Haas 1994.

<sup>25</sup> Akurgal 2000, 114-115, 119-120.

<sup>26</sup> Plat. *Phaid.* 246b- 249e.

<sup>27</sup> Şahin 1996, fn. 147.

<sup>28</sup> Ziegler *et al.* 1979, 79; Grimal 1997, 726-727; Hofstetter – Krauskopf 1997; Hofstetter 2009.

<sup>29</sup> Hofstetter – Krauskopf 1997, 1099; Grimal 1997, 726-727; Erhat 2000, 268-269.

Fig. 11. *Ishtar from Kargamiş*Fig. 12. *Mesopotamian Ishtar*

of sirens begin to be found in the Orientalizing Period<sup>30</sup> and in these depictions these hybrid creatures are employed to form a part in ornamental animal friezes and do not have a thematic sense<sup>31</sup>. The name siren first occurs on an animal frieze on a vase dating from the VI century B.C.<sup>32</sup> (fig. 13). Prior to this period they had sometimes been depicted without carrying any thematic sense, as a female, or sometimes as a bearded man<sup>33</sup>. For example, they are depicted together with an erotic subject on a *kylix* and are employed as a filling pattern on a variety of pottery examples<sup>34</sup>. That these creatures, recognized as female in Greek Mythology, are depicted in different gender and without any regard to thematic content can be explained as being a consequence of their being foreign imports into the Greek belief system<sup>35</sup>.

Fig. 13. *Aryballos*

<sup>30</sup> Buschor mentions a human headed bird on a piece of ceramic, dated to the Late Mycenaean Period; but he identifies this figure as a work of non-Greek thought. See: Buschor 1944, 17; For Corinthian ceramic workshops in the Orientalising Period see: Akurgal 1997.

<sup>31</sup> Akurgal 1997, pl. 13, pl. 22. 1, pl. 53. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Buschor 1944, 44 fig. 34.

<sup>33</sup> For male sirens see: Buschor 1944, 22 figs. 7-8, 11; Hofstetter 1990, pl. 2 K5, K38, pl. 3, K19.

<sup>34</sup> Hofstetter 1990 pl. 13, A 117, pl. 12, A 101, A 133.

<sup>35</sup> Buschor notes that siren of different genders may be associated with bearded or un-bearded depictions of Ba. See: Buschor 1944, 22.

Homer's epic *Odysseia* is the primary source mentioning sirens in a mythological context, while they were often been depicted in vase paintings from the mid VI century B.C.<sup>36</sup> onwards. In the epic, Queen Circe tells Odysseus, who is struggling to return to his homeland, of the dangers he will face in his journey and she identifies the *Sirens* as such<sup>37</sup>:

*“First you will come to the Sirens who enchant all who come near them. If anyone unwarily draws in too close and hears the signing of the Sirens, his wife and children will never welcome him home again, for they sit in a green field and warble him to death with the sweetness of their song. There is a great heap of dead men’s bones lying all around, with the flesh still rotting off them”.*

As can be clearly understood from this text, sirens are creatures who fascinate people through their beautiful voices but this fascination leads to their death<sup>38</sup>. In the tradition of Homer, Sirens associated with death are found depicted on Classical Period Athenian white ground *lekythoi* with a grave stele function<sup>39</sup> (fig. 14) and they are mostly depicted playing a lyre and their connection with death is only indicated through their depiction on an element of grave ritual. N. Şahin states the view of sirens as “symbolizing the dead soul” is not accepted, but does not comment on the presence of these figures in connection with these *lekythoi*<sup>40</sup>. Following their depiction on grave *lekythoi*, during the IV century B.C. Sirens were carved on grave steles and were employed on them into the Roman period<sup>41</sup>.



Fig. 14. White Ground Lekythos

As a result, in Greek belief the Sirens' connection with death can be said to begin with Homer. But after Homer, these creatures are not associated with death in any way until they are depicted on Classical Period *lekythoi* and grave steles and their connection with death has yet to be fully explained. However, the association Homer made, of Sirens with death may be related to traces of an ancient Eastern belief, as it is known that some of the narrations given in the *Illiad* by Homer from Smyrna, concerning the underworld and death connect with the belief systems of the Hittites and of Mesopotamia<sup>42</sup>.

Depictions of Sirens are also found on the Aegean coast of Anatolia contemporary with those in Greek art; as mentioned above, these creatures with orientalising influences were often depicted in vase paintings. In the early period they are observed in animal friezes or as individual motifs on ceramics and these depictions do not support a thematic content, as on the Western coast of the

<sup>36</sup> Buschor 1944, 45 fig. 36; Hofstetter 1990, 100 pl. 9, A 140.

<sup>37</sup> Hom. *Od.* XII. 39f.

<sup>38</sup> For the association of Sirens with music see: Holford-Stevens 2006, 16 ff.; Grimal 1997, 726- 727.

<sup>39</sup> Smith 1892, 104; Hofstetter 1990, 94- 95; Şahin 1996, 143, 164.

<sup>40</sup> Şahin 1996, 164.

<sup>41</sup> Buschor 1944, 69f.; Hofstetter 1990, pl. 35, A 216.

<sup>42</sup> Sevinç 2007, 91-92.

Aegean. However, their depiction associated with death is found earlier than in the West Aegean. The first examples are the Sirens depicted on the Klazomenai sarcophagus dating from the last quarter of VI century B.C. However, it should be noted that the Siren depictions on terracotta Ionian sarcophagi do not participate in a certain subject as they do on Greek grave *lekythoi*, and therefore their relationship with death is limited to their association with graves<sup>43</sup>.

Despite the examples that are employed on graves, their relation with the soul remains semantically unresolved and these hybrid creatures are first encountered with this function in Anatolia on Lycian grave reliefs. At first glance it can be understood that the sirens depicted on the “*Harpy*” monument are soul bearers (fig. 1-5). In “*Building F*”, the siren on the column stands as a symbol of death, as if it has fulfilled its allotted task (fig. 6). On these two monumental Lycian tombs there are in total five siren figures<sup>44</sup>. The Lycian siren is distinguished and particularised through their humanlike organs on the body, distinct from siren depictions of different cultures and showing a different typology. Contemporary and similar examples are also on the sima frieze of the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus and in Cyzicus<sup>45</sup>. B. Gibson identifies these creatures with the “*Harpy*” described in Homeros’ epic *Odysseia*<sup>46</sup>, and the kidnapping of King Pandareos’ daughters<sup>47</sup>; hence the pillar tomb obtained the name “*Harpy*” tomb<sup>48</sup>. However, in later investigations these creatures have been understood as not possessing the formidable characteristics of the *Harpy* and for iconographic reasons are therefore described as sirens<sup>49</sup>.

It was suggested these creatures were similar to the Egyptian Ba birds in terms of their body shape and meaning, and a further connection is established between the egg-like body form and the ‘Orphic’ egg<sup>50</sup>. O. S. Tonks who made the identification of the Egyptian Ba birds, has suggested that these creatures are the spirit of dead people and that the small figures which they carry in their arms

<sup>43</sup> The earlier occurrence of Ionian examples was explained orally by F. Işık, through Ionian influence in art and thought upon the Western shores of the Aegean Sea.

<sup>44</sup> On the west wall of the Kızılbel Tomb there is a winged human depiction. Identified by some researcher as a Siren, Mellink (1998, 59) identifies this figure as simply a winged woman, and its flight on top of a warrior who is returning to Homeros, is explained by her as a protective figure. Also she asserts that this figure is close to the figures on the “*Harpy*” monument, which is called “*Harpy*” by her; that these kind of Lycian winged protectors are autonomous and they are not derived from other flying figures such as Eros and Nikai in Greek banquet scenes.

<sup>45</sup> Smith 1928, 96; Akurgal 1961, fig. 226; Hofstetter 1990, pl. 19; Rudolph 2003, 23; Rudolph asserts that the sirens from Cyzicus are of Ionian work and of the same typology as the Lycian sirens.

<sup>46</sup> Hom. *Od.* XX. 65-78.

<sup>47</sup> Fellows 1841, 171f.; 1852, 340.

<sup>48</sup> Fellows 1841, 171f.; 1843, 19.

<sup>49</sup> Smith 1892, 104; Tonks 1907, fn. 1; Pryce 1928, 124. Pollard (1977, 189) asserts that Homeros describes Sirens as vicious creatures and the Sirens on the “*Harpy*” tomb are obviously from their depiction formidable. Vermeule (1979, 169) called these figures harpia, and asserts the small figures carried by them are depicted as “*going to the otherworld in happiness*”. Considering that Lycia is a country of Sarpedon, she adduces that the words ‘Sarpedon’ and ‘Harpy’ can be linguistically associated with each other. The most important appraisal for our subject matter is the acceptance of these scenes as being more Lycian than Ionian. It’s obvious that there is confusion in both Pollard and Vermeule’s denomination of these creatures and in the meanings which they impute to them, clearly indicating there is no consensus concerning these figures either terminologically or in terms of their iconography.

<sup>50</sup> Tonks 1907, 336-337. For an opinion on Orphic egg see: Tonks 1907, 322 and fn. 2.

are the deceased person as himself<sup>51</sup>. A. S. Shahbazi suggested that this grave, supposed to belong to a member of the 'Harpagos' dynasty, named this monument the "*Harpagid Monument*"<sup>52</sup> and supports C. Smith's view that these creatures served the function of carrying the dead person as Sleep and Death or as Boreas and Zephyros carry away dead heroes to their grave<sup>53</sup>. Researchers usually identified the small figures in sirens' arms as the spirit or eidola<sup>54</sup>. Mentioning the relationship between the figures and Sirens, C. Smith notes that they are carried by the sirens carefully and similarly this idea of moving people or the spirit is also present in their depictions on white ground *lekythoi*<sup>55</sup>. While studying the sirens on the "*Harpy*" monument E. Buschor identified them as birds that are protective, friendly and the apostles of the sky and therefore the figures they are carrying do not go to Hades<sup>56</sup>; and E. Hofstetter asserts that these figures are being carried to the heroic world of the deceased<sup>57</sup>. Ş. Özüdoğru<sup>58</sup> asserts, on the strength of the meaning of sirens in Greek literature as "*becoming lost in the sea and do not returning to the homeland*", that the presence of these creatures on this monument supports the idea that this tomb was for I. Kuprlli (Old Kuprlli)<sup>59</sup>.

Research on Lycia indicates the people of this region had some unique characteristics and there must be some religious justification for them to regard sirens as soul bearer for these people with their local characteristics, especially in their language and religion. According to H. Froning this way of depiction reflects the Lycian beliefs concerning death<sup>60</sup>. In this context, while examining the past of bird and of hybrid creatures, some of those mentioned above are important. The Ba which in Egypt is symbol of the soul pictorially exactly parallels the creature termed Siren in Greek thought. But they separate from each other in the meaning they carry, as Ba symbolized the spirit of the dead, while the siren has divine characteristics thought to have been lately bestowed. In this sense, the pictorial and intellectual association of these human-headed birds with Zu, thought to be one of the Mesopotamian gods of the underworld is remarkable. A passage in the Gilgamesh epic, considered the basis of Mesopotamian mythology is important in this respect, as, when Enkidu narrates his dream to Gilgamesh, he says that he is taken by the birds and brought to the otherworld. Moreover the motif of Etana carried to the presence of the Gods in the lap of eagles on Mesopotamian cylinder seals, shows that birds are regarded as a means of reaching the presence of the gods or of travelling to the otherworld as is described in Gilgamesh. Although that written in Gilgamesh and that

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<sup>51</sup> Tonks 1907, 337. Because these figures do not have wings, he asserts that they cannot be the soul itself and the association of the Egyptian Ka-Ba here must be disassembled. Also he said that in Greek thought, the soul can be seen as human headed-bird bodied creature, indicating as an example a vase on which is depicted "*the death of Procris*", where he identifies the human headed bird creature over the head of Procris, as her soul. However Pollard for this same figure proposes it as symbol of her bad destiny. See: Pollard 1977, 189.

<sup>52</sup> Shahbazi 1975, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Shahbazi 1975, 22.

<sup>54</sup> Smith 1892, 104; Berger 1970, 129; Rudolph 2003, 22; Froning 2004, 316.

<sup>55</sup> Smith 1892, 104. Also indicates that "*harpy*"(ies) in Greek thought are perceived as wind, disaster as a result of a storm with great wind speed.

<sup>56</sup> Buschor 1944, 36- 38.

<sup>57</sup> Hofstetter 1990, 245 ff.

<sup>58</sup> Özüdoğru 2008, 146. I. Kuprlli, joined the Salamis Sea War as a commander of Lycian ships in Xerxes naval force and did not return. The monument was raised by II. Kuprlli to honour the memory of I. Kuprlli (Old Kuprlli).

<sup>59</sup> Demargne 1958, 44- 45; Shahbazi 1975, 46 ff.; Keen 1992, 59.

<sup>60</sup> Froning 2004, 316.

recorded in the Etana motif do not overlap with Sirens as a pictorial image, in other words as “birds”; its perception in Mesopotamia seems a determinant within the scope of Lycia.

In this context, it is a remarkable fact that the Hittites offer birds connected only with death and underworld and see them as means of access to the underworld. In Greek thought, the bird is not considered to be the soul bearer but to be the symbol of soul. Although Sirens are divine creatures, in the beginning they contain different subjects and narrations. The conveyance of the deceased or the spirit is perceived differently in Greek thought. Although vase paintings depict scenes of the deceased moved by a winged-human figure, this being is interpreted as the conveyor of the soul<sup>61</sup>,



Fig. 15. *Calix Krater. Work of Euphronios.*

the generally accepted view is that the bodies of these heroes are actually being conveyed to the grave. The scene of the conveyance of Sarpedon's death is the most prominent example of this view<sup>62</sup> (fig. 15). However, with creatures related to the underworld being winged in both Mesopotamian and Hittite thought and the same being followed also in Greek thought can be explained through parallel perceptions within different cultures. Another important point concerning the conveyance of soul in the Greek belief system is the Muses accompaniment of the soul in its ascendance to the sky<sup>63</sup>. However no visual data describing these cases have been discovered to date. What is understood from all these observations is that the Siren motifs on Lycian grave reliefs are to be understood as different from the concept of the conveyance of body to the grave in Greek thought. It is clearly seen on “Harpy” monument that the Sirens are the creatures who carry the soul or body of the tomb owner into the world beyond. But it is difficult at present to

<sup>61</sup> Smith 1892-93, 104.

<sup>62</sup> Hom. *Od.* XVI. 53- 56.

<sup>63</sup> Şahin 1996, fn. 162, 167.

answer the question as to if the soul is being brought to the heroic land of the dead or to a world other than “*Hades*”.

The tight relationship and the interactions between cultures is also a reason for these bird creatures being depicted in different communities over long periods and, within this context, the soul bearer mission of the sirens found on Lycian grave reliefs may reflect some traces from this more distant past. As mentioned above; in Mesopotamian thought the conveyance of the deceased to the world beyond was by birds, as later in the Hittite understanding of birds as a means of reaching the gods and of mortals reaching the world beyond, cast some light on the confessional background to these hybrid creatures. The sirens of Homeros being associated with death in the VIII century B.C. was a consequence of these creatures’ earlier association with death and their part in ancient Near Eastern religious history.

In this context the soul-bearer ‘Sirens’ , which appear on Classical Period Lycian tomb reliefs, are interpreted as a reflection of the II millenium B.C. Mesopotamian and Anatolian thought in the I millenium and that this point of view deduced about the religious and iconografic origins of the creatures would shed light upon the Lycian belief of death and their understanding of afterlife, seems likely.

**List of Figures**

Fig. 1. Xanthos “*Harpy*” Tomb. West Side.

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx) Search: Harpy, Xanthos (20.03.2013)

Fig. 2. Xanthos “*Harpy*” Tomb. South Side.

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx) Search: Harpy, Xanthos (20.03.2013)

Fig. 3. Xanthos “*Harpy*” Tomb. North Side.

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx) Search: Harpy, Xanthos (20.03.2013)

Fig. 4. Xanthos “*Harpy*” Tomb. East Side.

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx) Search: Harpy, Xanthos (20.03.2013)

Fig. 5. Xanthos “*Harpy*” Tomb. Sirens.

Fig. 6. Xanthos “F” Monument.

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx) Search: Gable, Xanthos (20.03.2013)

Fig. 7. Egyptian Wall Painting. Thebes. Temür 2009: Fig. 393.

Fig. 8. “Zu” Depiction on Cylinder Seal. Akkadian.

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx) Search : Akkadian cylinder seal.(20.03.2013)

Fig. 9. “Etanna and Eagle” Motif on Cylinder Seal.

[http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search\\_the\\_collection\\_database.aspx](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/search_the_collection_database.aspx) Search: Akkadian cylinder seal.(20.03.2013)

Fig. 10. Hittite Ishtar from Karahöyük. Sevinç 2007: Table 40.

Fig. 11. Ishtar from Kargamış. Sevinç 2007: Table 41.

Fig. 12. Mesopotamian Ishtar. <http://www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights.aspx>. Search: Queen of the Night. (20.03.2013)

Fig. 13. Aryballos. Buschor 1944: Fig.34.

Fig. 14. White Ground *Lekythos*.

[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NAMA\\_Ulysse\\_&\\_sir%C3%A8ne\\_1.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:NAMA_Ulysse_&_sir%C3%A8ne_1.jpg) (31.05.2010)

Fig. 15. Calix Krater. Work of Euphronios. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Euphronios\\_krater\\_-\\_front.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Euphronios_krater_-_front.jpg) (31.05.2010)

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