
Graves for cattle, cattle for graves – Two examples from Egypt and Sudan.

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Résumé

The importance of cattle in African cultures and particularly in North-East Africa, is attested by various testimonies (mummies, bones, art, texts).

Two cases are presented: In Egypt, the sites of Saqqarah and Abusir were characterized during Ptolemaic times (around 700-30 BC) by graves devoted to sacred bulls and cows belonging to a special breed, Apis. Whole skeletons, skulls and various bones are kept in Lyon, allowing a good description of their morphology and dimensions. A comparison with cattle deposits found in a pit at Dayr al-Barsha (Middle Egypt) dated around 400 BC, show a clear similarity with the bulls from Saqqarah.

In Sudan, the site of Kerma, in the northern part of the country, dated between 2500 to 1500 BC, delivered, beside the antique town, a large cemetery. The graves from Middle Kerma period (2050-1750 BC) are surrounded by skulls of cattle sometimes in very large quantities.

The detailed study of more than thousand bucrania, belonging to longhorn type too, indicate clear differences with animals found in Egypt and very clearly, another breed. These aspects will be discussed in this presentation.

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