

CONNECTIONS AND COMPLEXITY

New Approaches to the Archaeology
of South Asia



For Dr. P.

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CHAPTER 6

Iconography of the Indus Unicorn: Origins and Legacy

Jonathan Mark Kenoyer

Introduction

The unicorn has always been viewed by cultures in Europe, West Asia, and even China and Japan as a mythical animal or at least something that is fantastic and rare. It is surprising, therefore, that in South Asia, particularly at sites of the Indus Civilization, the discovery of one-horned animal motifs on seals and one-horned animal figurines in terracotta has been the source of typological and terminological controversy for more than 125 years.

The earliest representation of a unicorn is found on seals and sealings from sites in the northern Indus region, dated to c. 2600 BC (Kenoyer 2009) (Figure 6.1)¹. This motif is not reported from any other contemporaneous civilization and appears to be unique to the Indus region. The unicorn motif continued to be used throughout the greater Indus region for over 700 years and disappeared along with Indus script and other diagnostic elements of Indus ideology and bureaucracy c. 1900 BC (Kenoyer 1998; Possehl 2002). The unicorn motif found on seals and other forms of Indus iconography has some basic standard elements but also shows considerable variation in minor aspects of decoration and engraving. The analysis presented in this chapter begins with the new data on the chronology of seals and seal carving from the site of Harappa combined with new information from other recent surveys and excavations in Pakistan and India.

Using a revised and more rigorous framework for analysis, it is possible to reexamine the seals and figurines recovered from earlier excavations

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Figure 6.1 Harappan Unicorn Seal, H99-4064, late Period 3C (2000–1900 BC), fired steatite, 2.5cm x 5.2cm.

to address the issues of variation within a site, regional stylistic patterns, and chronological frameworks. Based on preliminary studies by various scholars, it appears that unicorn stylistic patterns may reflect workshop and artist's idiosyncrasies, as well as regional variations (Franke-Vogt 1991, 1992; Jamison 2012; Kenoyer 1997, 2009; Rissman 1989). There also appears to be some change over time that may indicate changing conventions in the representation of the unicorn itself.

The disappearance of the unicorn motif in South Asia and its continued legacy outside the subcontinent is also an important topic that is addressed below. Extensive studies of the unicorn myth by scholars who were not aware of the Indus unicorn need to be revised in view of the early appearance of the Indus unicorn. Dr. Gregory Possehl's writings have been a great source of information in this study (Possehl 1996, 1999, 2002), and the new data and perspectives that I present here will hopefully contribute to the discussion.

General Geography and Chronology

The geographic region in which the earliest iconography of the unicorn has been found is generally referred to as the greater Indus Valley (Mughal

1989), which includes the Indus River and its tributaries, as well as the parallel-flowing, but now dry Saraswati-Ghaggar-Hakra-Nara River. Surrounding highlands and deserts, Kutch and Gujarat, as well as the upper reaches of the Ganga-Yamuna River Valley are also associated with the greater Indus Valley. It is in this expansive area that agro-pastoral communities established settlements and eventually urban centers that are associated with the Indus Civilization or Indus Tradition (Table 6.1) (Kenoyer 1991, 2008; Shaffer 1992). First discovered at the sites of Harappa (Vats 1940) and Mohenjo-daro in the 1920–1930s (Mackay 1938; Marshall 1931), this civilization has been the focus of considerable research and multiple excavations throughout Pakistan, western India, and adjacent regions (Kenoyer 1998; Possehl 2002).

During the Regionalization Era, particularly during the Kot Diji Phase (c. 2800–2600 BC), the foundations of urbanism and later socioeconomic and ideological organization were established in settlements such as Harappa, Mohenjo-daro, Rakhigarhi, and Dholavira (Kenoyer 2008; Possehl 1999). Terracotta figurines of animals and humans that were probably used for ritual or ideological purposes have been found at most Kot Diji phase settlements. Button seals and graffiti on pottery have been found at a large number of sites; but so far, Harappa is the only site that has clear evidence for the use of square seals with animal motifs and Early Indus script (Kenoyer and Meadow 2008). However, no representations of unicorns on seals or as figurines have been reported from Early Harappan sites, and the appearance of this motif seems to be closely linked to the Harappan Phase of the Integration Era (2600–1900 BC)(Kenoyer 2009).

During the Harappan Phase, numerous urban centers and their supporting hinterlands became linked through regional trade networks. Archaeological evidence of these relationships reveals shared social,

Table 6.1 Overall Chronology of the Indus Tradition

Regionalization Era	
Early Harappan Phases Ravi, Hakra, Sheri Khan Tarakai, Balakot, Amri, Kot Diji, Sothi, etc.	5500–2600 BC
Integration Era	
Harappan Phase—general dates	2600–1900 BC
Harappa—Period 3A, 2600–2450 BC	
Harappa—Period 3B, 2450–2200 BC	
Harappa—Period 3C, 2200–1900 BC	
Localization Era	
Late Harappan Phases Punjab, Jhukar, Rangpur, Bara, etc.	1900–1300 BC

political, and ideological traditions. The Harappan Phase can be divided into three subperiods that are based on architectural developments and changes in various types of artifacts, including pottery, seals, tablets, and other inscribed objects (Kenoyer 2008; Meadow and Kenoyer 2005, 2008). It is during the initial Harappan Phase (Period 3A, 2600–2450 BC) that the first evidence for the use of unicorn iconography has been documented on a sealing from the site of Farmana (Kenoyer 2009; Shinde *et al.* 2008). This image continued to be used up to the end of the final Harappan Phase (Period 3C, 2200–1900 BC).

The Indus cities continued to be occupied during the Localization Era, which is also referred to as the Late Harappan period (1900–1300 BC). This was a period of urban transformation and fragmentation that resulted in localized trade and social networks and eventually the disappearance of many distinguishing features of Indus culture. For example, Indus seals, writing, terracotta figurines, and iconographic images like the unicorn motif, were no longer used by people living in the cities or the surrounding countryside. While some regard this period as the decline of the Indus Civilization, it is also seen as a transitional period leading to the eventual rise of a new urban and cultural tradition that eventually encompassed the Indus and the Gangetic River systems (Kenoyer 2006; Possehl 1997). Although many aspects of Indus culture were adopted and modified in later periods, the unicorn motif developed by the Indus artists did not re-emerge in later South Asian iconography. After a considerable hiatus, the unicorn motif does re-emerge in the regions in West Asia and eventually Europe, East Asia, and possibly Tibet (Hathaway 1980; Lavers 2010; Shepard 1978). Yet, these authors do not cite the Indus unicorn representations, and at present there is no clear link between the Indus and these later unicorn representations.

Earliest Discoveries of the Indus Unicorn

One of the first-reported discoveries linked to the Indus Civilization was a seal carved with a unicorn motif, though it was not initially recognized as such. When Cunningham visited the site of Harappa in 1872–73, he acquired a heavily worn and rounded Indus seal that had been collected by a Major Clark (Possehl 1999).

The seal is a smooth black stone without polish. On it is engraved very deeply a bull, without hump, looking to the right, with two stars under the neck. Above the bull there is an inscription in six characters, which are quite unknown to me. They are certainly not Indian letters; and as the bull which accompanies them is without a hump, I conclude that the seal is foreign to India (Cunningham 1875, 108).

Although Cunningham described the animal motif as being that of a “bull” without a hump this motif was in fact the typical Indus unicorn. Two other early reports of unicorn seals were examples purchased from antique dealers. One was purchased in Cairo in 1912, but possibly came through antique dealers in Damascus (Possehl 1999, 53 citing Bissing 1927). The other was purchased in the Punjab by Professor H. D. Griswold around the same time and was donated to the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1929 (Possehl 1999, 53 citing Coomaraswamy 1929). The main feature that distinguished these carved motifs as unicorns was of course the presence of a single horn emerging from the back of the skull and arching forward over the head. Other features that made its identification problematic was the fact that the overall body and other physical features were very similar to other more commonly known animals, such as the ox or antelope, that were also depicted by the Indus seal carvers.

Sir John Marshall, the early excavator of Mohenjo-daro speaks of the fact that the Indus engravers were quite adept at showing two horns when they wanted to. “In the face of this we are bound, I think, to conclude that a one-horned creature is intended to be understood on these seals, and unless there is any truth in the ancient tradition of a one-horned ox in India, we must regard this creature as fabulous” (Marshall 1931, Vol. 1: 68–9). In the footnote to this text, he explains that prior to the discovery of the Indus unicorn the earliest reference is by Ctesias, a Greek writer who described an Indian one-horned ass or ox that he had heard about during his stay in the Achaemenid court. The original writings of Ctesias are now lost, but portions were preserved in later texts, and he is thought to have returned to Greece around 398 BC (Shepard 1978).

Marshall concludes that “it is now obvious that the idea of a one-horned ox is much older than Achaemenian time” (Marshall 1931, Vol. 1, 69). He also goes on to describe the iconographic problems of identifying this animal, which he assumes is a male.

In some respects the body of this beast, which is always a male, resembles that of an antelope of heavy build, such as the eland or oryx, and in others that of an ox. The long tufted tail may belong to either class. The horn is sometimes smooth; sometimes it has transverse ridges. In the latter case, the possibility of the creature being an ox is ruled out. The long pointed ears are also characteristic of the antelope. Perhaps we have here a fabulous animal, which is a composite of the ox and the antelope. And yet to the casual eye there is nothing fantastic about it, as the unicorn of heraldry, which is made up of different parts of a number of animals, though it must be noted that the traditional unicorn was supposed to have originated in India (Marshall 1931 Vol. 2, 382).

After all of his discussions about the pros and cons of identification of the one-horned animal on the seals, Marshall concludes “for the sake of convenience, however, we shall designate this animal a ‘unicorn,’ until a more fitting name has been found for it” (Marshall 1931, Vol. 2, 382). Two leading Indian archaeologists also referred to these motifs as representing a mythical one-horned animal or unicorn. Others, such as M.S. Vats, refer to unicorn motifs on seals from his excavations at Harappa (Vats 1940, 321). Majumdar also found one-horned terracotta figurines in his excavations at Chanhu-daro that he identified as unicorns and as being identical to the motifs found on the Indus seals (Majumdar 1934).

In contrast to these scholars, Mackay—who also excavated at Mohenjo-daro—was convinced that the unicorn was really a two-horned bovine seen from the side (Mackay 1938). This perspective may have been due to his prior experiences working in Mesopotamia, where depictions of bulls on seals and reliefs often showed these two-horned animals in profile with only one horn. Mackay also excavated at the site of Chanhu-daro and found a number of one-horned terracotta figurines, but he developed elaborate explanations as to why they were not unicorns (Mackay 1943).

Due to limited space, it is not possible to present all the different perspectives on the unicorn, but these two perspectives have continued to resurface in the literature up until the present day (During-Caspers 1991; Parpola 1994; Wheeler 1968). In one of his widely read publications, Possehl states,

The term ‘unicorn’ may be a misnomer and is certainly not proved. It is generally assumed that the animal on these seals is the western non-humped *Bos taurus*, the appearance of a single horn being a stylistic convention. Since the animal is shown in exact profile we have to imagine the second horn hidden behind the one in the foreground. This was a device used in Mesopotamian art (Possehl 1996, 27).

After discussing various other viewpoints, he presents a slightly different view and concludes that “One might legitimately be left to wonder if the story of the Indian unicorn related by Ctesias might be partly right, and that Harappan lore included a mythical one-horned animal. We just do not know” (Possehl 1996, 31). However, in a later publication he reverts to his earlier statement that “In the end, I believe that the single horn on the unicorn seals was an artistic convention. This implies that the animal is probably a real bull and that the unicorn of India as reported by Ctesias is a separate matter” (Possehl 2002, 131). These two perspectives continue to surface in the literature, and it is high time to take the animal by the horn and make a conclusive statement.

After examining unicorn seals in detail and also examining most extant examples of terracotta unicorn figurines, I am convinced that the Indus seal carvers and clay modelers intentionally depicted a one-horned animal that should be considered the earliest example of the unicorn. Until the Indus script is deciphered, we will probably not know what they called this animal, but it is not unlikely that the word is incorporated in many of the inscriptions found on the seals themselves.

Unicorn Features and Variations

General iconographic features of unicorns carved on seals have been discussed by other scholars (Franke-Vogt 1991, 1992; Rissman 1989), but some general features will be reviewed because of their relevance to the present argument about the mythical nature of this animal. On seals, the unicorn is always depicted in profile with a tapering face that is oriented horizontally or upraised, but never turned down (Figure 6.2). The upturned snout is typical of animals when smelling the breeze to identify predators or making a display of dominance. The muzzle or snout is always rounded with a distinct flaring nostril and sometimes the mouth is carved with a straight or curved line that may indicate it being slightly open. In many examples, however, the mouth is not indicated, and the relatively narrow rounded muzzle is connected to a larger massive lower jaw that is represented with a broad curve. The jaw is usually smooth with no hanging hair or dewlap. But on some unicorn carvings, the lower jaw is depicted with a jagged fringe that may represent hair or a short beardlike feature (Figure 6.1). Generally speaking, the narrow tapered head is comparable to that of a blackbuck, or even a horse. However, it should be pointed out that no conclusive horse bones or skulls have been identified in the Indus Valley (Meadow and Patel 1997, 2003).

The eyes are carved in various forms, but usually have a distinct upper lid and eyebrow that is sometimes incised to depict eyelashes or a hairy eyebrow (Figure 6.1). The single horn invariably emerges from the back of the head just behind the edge of the eyebrow. The horn is wider at the base and tapers gently to the tip in a long “S” curve. Sometimes the horn is depicted as having a smooth surface, (Figure 6.2) and sometimes it is ridged or highlighted with exterior projecting spikes that may be an artistic convention to show ridging (Figure 6.1). The horns of the blackbuck have a spiraling ridge, and this may be what the artist was trying to represent. A single upright and pointed ear is depicted behind the horn at the back of the head, but the specific ear shapes range from triangular to lenticular in form.



Figure 6.2 Unicorn seal, detail of head, H95-2491, scanning electron microscope photo.

The convex arching neck is slender at the base of the head and becomes quite thick where it joins the massive shoulders and forward-projecting chest. This type of convex arched neck is seen on most species of horse; however, on the unicorn, there is no mane depicted on the top part of the arch. Antelope and deer do not have a mane, but the neck on these species has a concave curve with an outward projecting throat. Most unicorn necks are decorated with some form of collar at the top of the neck, with multiple bands reaching down to the shoulder or withers. A distinctive shoulder covering is depicted with single or double lines, which has been interpreted as a harness or blanket of some sort. The various forms of neck decoration and shoulder ornament are made with deep incising, while the haunches are sometimes depicted with gentle curves and depressions or distinctive ridges. One unique example of a unicorn carved in relief on a pendant shows additional motifs carved over the belly and the haunches (Figure 6.3). In this example, the design over



Figure 6.3 Unicorn pendant, Mohenjo-daro, DK 8063, National Museum Karachi, NMP 50.125, unfired steatite, 6.3cm x 6.8cm.

the shoulders looks very much like the pipal leaf motif seen in many other forms of Indus art. Further, the design over the belly looks like what can be called the “womb” motif (Kenoyer 1998). The entire pendant is made in a variant shape of the womb motif. Nevertheless, as discussed below, it is unlikely that the unicorn represents a female fertility symbol.

The forequarters and hindquarters of the animal are generally depicted as massive and muscular, with a long narrow belly that has a long tapered flap of skin hanging from the center or rear portion of the belly. This feature is very similar to the pronounced pizzle (penis) seen on adult bulls (Figure 6.4), which is very pronounced on seals with bull motifs (Figure 6.5). It should be pointed out, however, that castrated male cattle or oxen generally do not have a distinct pendant pizzle. Additionally, although some female cattle have a flap of skin hanging in the same general spot that is a remnant of the umbilical cord, it is not as pronounced as that seen on males. Marshall originally proposed that the unicorn carvings depicted a male animal (Marshall 1931, Vol. 2), and many examples are depicted with two distinctly carved testicles or a single testicle seen in profile.

The convention of depicting testicles is quite rare, and only a small number of unicorn seals have this feature (Harappa 14 examples [6.76%, $n = 207$]; Mohenjo-daro 30 examples [7.98%, $n = 376$]). In contrast,

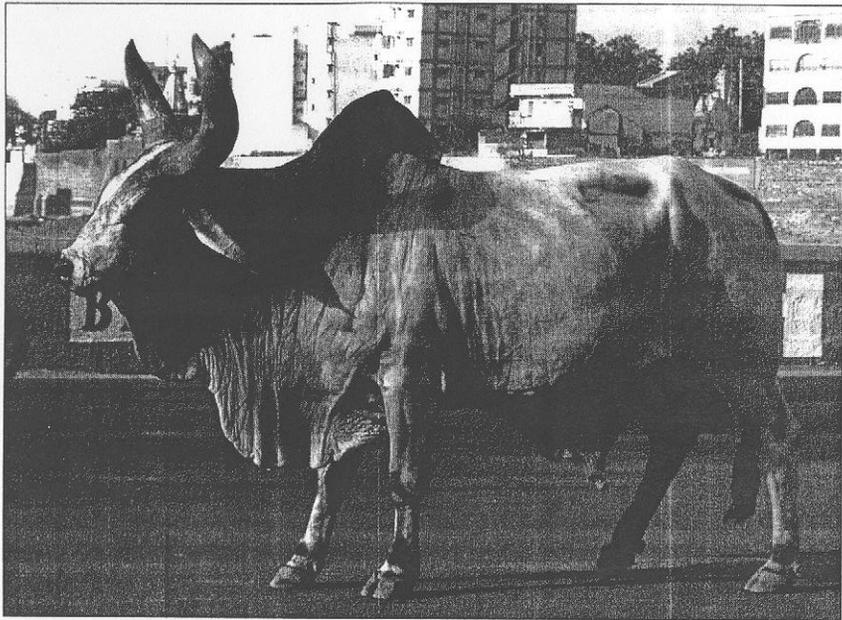


Figure 6.4 Bull, Bhuj, Gujarat.



Figure 6.5 Bull seal, Mohenjo-daro, B588, Islamabad Museum, NMP 50.273, fired steatite, 3.75cm x 3.9cm.

even though seals with the bull motifs are in fact relatively rare, testicles are more commonly depicted on bull motifs found on seals (Harappa 1 example [25%, $n = 4$] and Mohenjo-daro 5, [20.83%, $n = 24$]). There are some rare examples of unicorns that do not have a pizzle (Mohenjo-daro, 2; Gola Dhoro, 1; Lothal, 1), but generally they all have some indication of this distinctive feature. There can be little doubt that the unicorns were intended to represent a male animal. In fact, most animals carved on the seals have a distinct pizzle even though in real life many of these species, such as the rhinoceros, do not have a prominent penis beneath the belly (Figure 6.6). This artistic convention suggests that animal motifs on the seals intentionally represented the virility and presumably the power of male animals.

The forelegs and hind legs are quite slender compared to the massive body, with well-defined knees, fetlocks, and hooves, but it is not possible to determine if the hooves were split or single. The slender tail is usually depicted emerging at the top of the rump and draping down the back of the leg, ending in a long bushy tuft like that seen on cattle. In summary, the unicorn cannot be likened to any single living animal species and is composed of physical characteristics of several different animals that would have been seen locally and well-known to the Indus artists. The



Figure 6.6 Rhinoceros seal, Mohenjo-daro, DK 7462, National Museum Karachi, NMP 50.273, fired steatite, 3.8cm x 3.8cm.

horse is one animal that was not present in the Indus but may have been known through long distance trading encounters with Afghanistan and Central Asia.

The unicorn is invariably depicted with what is referred to as an offering stand or cult object set in front of the body and directly below the head. The function of this offering stand has been extensively discussed by other scholars (Mahadevan 1985, 1994; Parpola 1994), but it is not critical to the discussions of the unicorn as it is also sometimes depicted with other animals. Indus writing on the seals is generally carved above the body and sometimes over the top of the horn. All seals are carved in reverse and on the seals the unicorn is most commonly facing to the left, which means that the impression of the unicorn would face to the right. However, there are examples of right facing unicorns on seals, which means that the impression would face to the left. Undoubtedly the direction of the animal had some significance, but there is no clear pattern that indicates different styles of unicorns face different directions.

Unicorn Figurines

While the two-dimensional images of unicorns depicted on seals could be argued to represent a two-horned bull seen from the side, the discovery of three-dimensional unicorn figurines leaves no question that the Indus artists intended to depict a one-horned animal. What is surprising, though, is that the figurines were discovered shortly after the discovery of the seals. Yet, they have never been adequately discussed. The first report of a unicorn figurine is presented by Majumdar after his preliminary excavations at Chanhu-daro. The fact that he specifically states that this is proof that the Indus artists were depicting a one-horned animal rather than a two-horned creature suggests that there was some disagreement about this from the very beginning. Majumdar (1934) stated "of terracotta objects, the most interesting is the figurine of an animal with one horn (Pl. XXI, 24). It suggests the possibility that the "unicorn" so common on the Indus seals may after all have been intended for an one-horned animal, and not a two-horned creature seen in profile" (p. 38). It is equally intriguing to find that when Mackay found several unicorn figurines from his more extensive excavations at the same site (Figure 6.7, a and b), he made what are clearly absurd arguments to explain why the one-horned animal was not a unicorn.

In the very interesting one-horned animal (Pls. LV, 10, 11, 13-15, LVI, 2) the single horn is quite definite, and though in general appearance the animal is not unlike the so-called "one-horned animal" on the seals (Pl. LI 2-33), the horn, which in only one figure projects forward (Pl. LV,

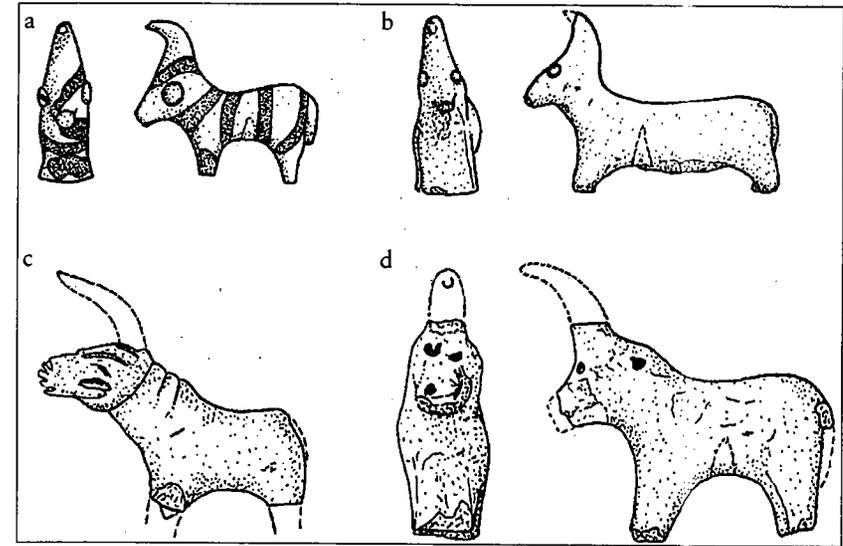


Figure 6.7 Unicorn figurines from Chanhu-daro (a, b), Mohenjo-daro (c), and Harappa (d).

11), has not the usual double curve. Mr. Majumdar, who also found a similar model in one of his trial trenches at Chanhu-daro, suggested that this animal may be the same as that represented on the seals, but further evidence makes this unlikely. These six figures give me the impression of being intended to represent donkeys. The large ears of a donkey, especially a young one, would have very much the same appearance as the apparent horns of these animals, and if, as is now the Arab custom, the tips of the ears were sewn together, the resemblance would be still closer.

Similar model animals were found at Mohenjo-daro, and from the roughness of their make, they all appear to be the work of children; the limitations of their material perhaps made it difficult to represent closely set horns or ears separately (Mackay 1943, 157-58).

In all other aspects of his interpretations and study of Indus materials, Mackay is usually quite objective and willing to take on new perspectives. In this case, it is quite uncharacteristic for him to be so insistent on not recognizing the unicorn figurine. One possible explanation that will require future research is that he did not want to conflate the unicorn of the Indus with the term "unicorn" used in the King James version of the Bible and its common representation in Medieval Christian iconography (Hathaway 1980). Mackay would have been intimately aware that the chronology of the Indus unicorn would put it at a time that predated the various events presented in the Bible where the unicorn was mentioned.

It is not known, however, if he was aware of the publication in 1930 that argues the incorrect translation of the Hebrew word *rem* into the Greek word *monokeros* or unicorn that was the basis for the later use of the word “unicorn” in the King James version of the Bible (Shepard 1978 [reprint of 1930 edition]: 42–5). Although we will never be able to understand why Mackay was not willing to recognize this motif as a unicorn, the evidence from figurines suggests that the Indus craftsmen intentionally depicted a mythical one-horned animal.

Excavations and surveys at several other sites have now turned up unicorn figurines, including a figurine with an upturned head and distinct eye at Mohenjo-daro (Figure 6.7, c) and one from Harappa (Figure 6.7, d). Other unicorn figurines have been reported from Dholavira (R. S. Bisht, Archaeological Survey of India, Personal Communication) and most recently from surveys of the site of Ganweriwala by Dr. Farzand Masih from Punjab University, Lahore (Figure 6.8).

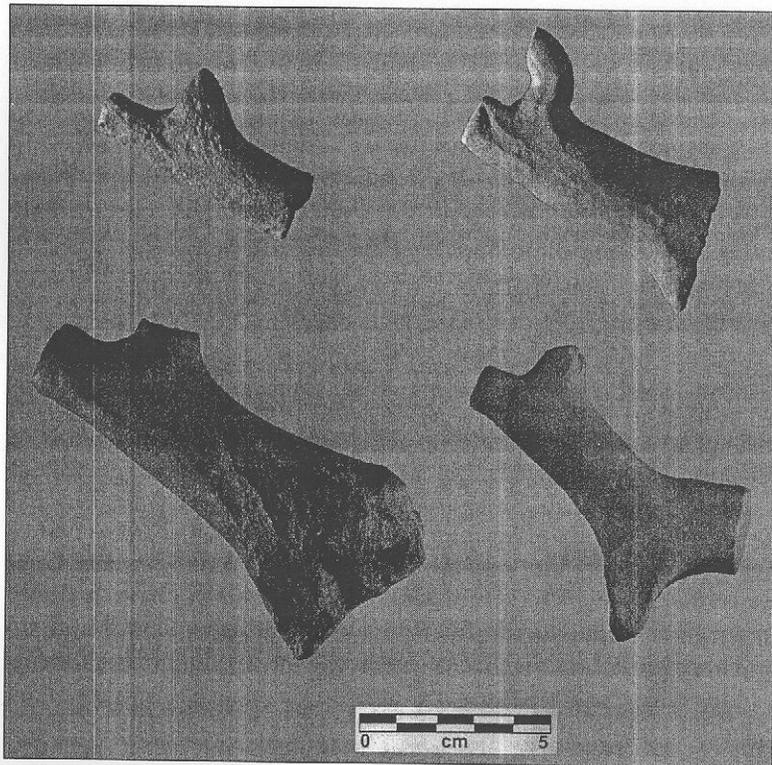


Figure 6.8 Ganweriwala unicorn figurines. Collected by Dr. Farzand Masih, Punjab University, curated at Harappa Museum.

Unicorn Ideology and Legacy

Many of the complete examples of terracotta unicorn figurines have a hole in the belly that may have been used to mount them on a stick to be carried in some form of ritual, or in a puppet show (Kenoyer 1998). There is one unique terracotta tablet from Mohenjo-daro that depicts a procession with a unicorn image carried on a high standard, as if it represented some deity or sacred emblem (Figure 6.9, a). The unicorn motif is also combined with other animal heads and unique geometric objects on various seals from Mohenjo-daro and Harappa to suggest that it had special symbolic meaning in contexts other than stamp seals (Joshi and Parpola 1987, M-296, M-297, M-298). One of the most important examples is seen on a molded terracotta tablet from Harappa that shows a human figure, with outstretched arms covered in bangles, standing between two unicorns (Figure 6.9, b), similar to the contest motif seen on seals with a human between two tigers. All of these examples indicate that the unicorn motif was closely linked to Indus ideology, and that it was not simply a clan or official symbol found on stamp seals.

The close affiliation with Indus ideology may have been one of the reasons why this motif disappeared with the decline of Indus urbanism, along with the Indus script, triangular terracotta cakes, cubical chert weights, and the tradition of burying the dead in coffins with pottery

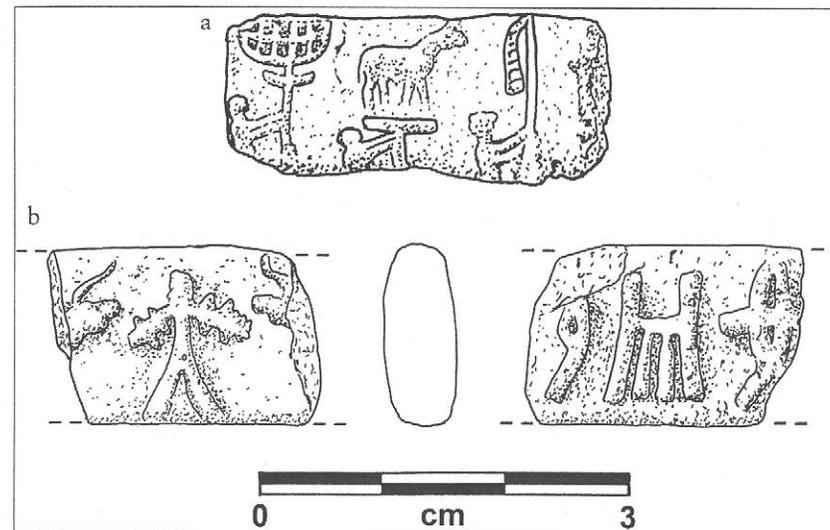


Figure 6.9 Unicorn ideology: (a) Unicorn standard, Mohenjo-daro, approximate scale, after Marshall 1931, Pl. CXVIII, 9; (b) Unicorn in contest scene, Harappa, H97-3416/8022-50.

offerings. In an earlier publication, I proposed that although the unicorn disappeared in the Indus, unicorn seals carried to Mesopotamia by Indus merchants may have spread the idea of the unicorn to the Near East. From there, it eventually reached the Mediterranean and was finally introduced into Europe (Kenoyer 1998). I am no longer sure if this is a valid explanation given the history of the unicorn motif as explained by Shepard (1978 [1930]). It is possible that some aspects of Indus unicorn iconography contributed to later myths in West Asia, but this is a discussion to be more fully developed elsewhere.

It is clear, however, that the unicorn motif did not continue in South Asia. Although Marshall claims that “the unicorn was, of course, a familiar creature of Indian folk stories, and Vishnu’s title of *Ekasringa* may conceivably embody some memory of this prehistoric beast, though it is just as likely that it owed its origin to the rhinoceros, from which also the unicorn we are discussing may ultimately have been derived” (Marshall 1931, Vol. 1, 69). While the Internet is now filled with discussions of the *Ekasringa*, usually associated with Krishna or Vishnu, and the term *Ekasringa* is sometimes associated with *Rishyashringa* (deer-horned) (Dallapiccola 2002, 166), the unicorn is not a familiar creature of South Asian iconography, sacred texts, or folk tales. However, I have recently come across a unique depiction of what might be a unicorn carved onto a seventeenth-century wooden mold used in Tibetan Bon rituals. This carving appears to be of an animal with one horn. In later Tibetan Buddhist iconography, the one-horned “singhe” is often depicted in paintings and sculpture. The Chinese also have a tradition for a one-horned animal, *xie zhi* (麒麟) and the more inclusive term, *qi lin* (麝), which begins to appear during the Han Dynasty 206 BC–AD 220 (possibly the Eastern Han 25–220 AD) (Zhichun Jing, University of British Columbia, personal communication 2009). The unicorn in China is said to come from afar and appears as an auspicious omen (Shepard 1978 [1930]).

In conclusion, it is clear that the Indus unicorn of South Asia is one of the first depictions of a one-horned animal. Although the motif does not continue in the art and ideology of South Asia, it does appear in other adjacent regions at a later time. At present, there is no direct connection between the Indus unicorn and those seen in later periods in West Asia, Europe, East Asia, and possibly Central Asia/Tibet. However, this is certainly a topic that deserves considerable future research. It is also important to continue to explore the possibility that the image has its roots in the Early Harappan period, which is the source of many aspects of Indus urbanism (Kenoyer 2008). In order to better understand the origins and legacy of this motif, we need to continue to develop more rigorous methods and expand our research

areas to include previously unexplored sites and regions. Thanks to the rigorous methods and data recording that Greg Possehl and other scholars in both India and Pakistan have been undertaking, we should be able to meet these research challenges and eventually reveal the mystery of the Indus unicorn.

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