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# The Harappan unicorn in Eurasian and South Asian perspectives

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## Abstract

The most frequently occurring iconographic motif of the Indus seals, with thousands of occurrences, is a unicorn bull, a male bovine animal with a single horn. Its exact zoological identity is still controversial, but while some scholars consider it to be a purely fabulous beast, perhaps a conflation of two or more real species, many authorities consider it to represent either the humpless wild cow called aurochs or urus (*Bos primigenius*) or the humpless taurine cow (*Bos taurus*). The religious meaning of the Harappan unicorn has remained unclear as well. The present study tries to solve this problem by considering both Eurasian unicorn myths and those which are particular to South Asia, as well as their historical evolution and context. The evidence strongly suggests that the Harappan unicorn was an integral part of this unicorn mythology, that it stood for male creative power, and that its cult purported to secure rain and fertility for purposes of agriculture and animal husbandry. The Harappan unicorn was probably originally the humpless bull of Western Asia, and then transformed in the Indus Valley into an image of the blue bull, the nilgai antelope (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*).

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## 1. The unicorn myth of medieval European bestiaries

People today probably know the 'unicorn' mainly from Hergé's *Tintin* comic books and from heraldry, especially the royal coat-of-arms of the United Kingdom (Figure 1), whose supporters symbolize the union of England (the lion) and Scotland (the unicorn)<sup>1</sup>.

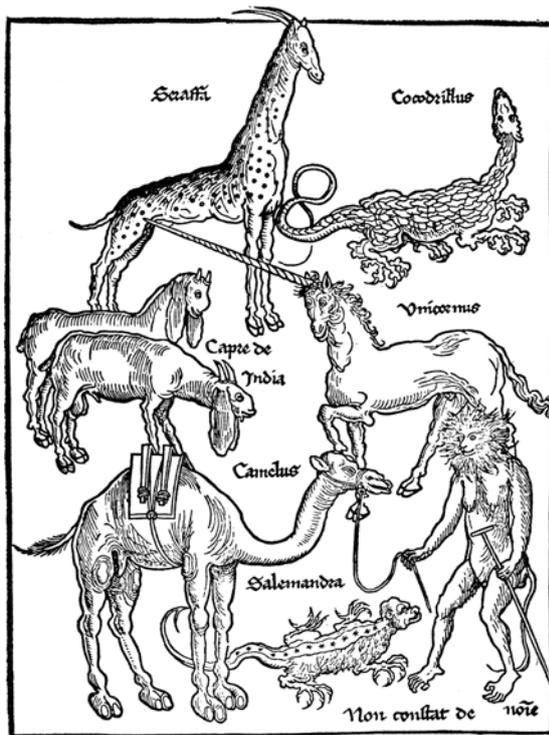
The unicorn<sup>2</sup> was a popular beast in medieval "bestiaries" with their moralizing descriptions of real and mythical animals. It was usually depicted as a real animal (horse-like, but sometimes as an antelope or a goat) with a long, sharp, twisted horn set in the middle of its forehead. An excellent example can be found in the first printed travelogue, Bernhard von Breydenbach's *Peregrinatio in terram sanctam* of 1486; since the author claims to have seen it in the Holy Land, its model may have been the oryx antelope (Figure 2).

The unicorn was supposed to be very strong, swift and ferocious. It loved solitude and hated male beings. When the unicorn attacked the lion (or a man), the latter typically moved quickly behind a tree at the last moment, so that the unicorn's horn would stick into the tree and get stuck there. Due to its swiftness and ferocity, the unicorn could only be captured by means of trickery. Another common way in medieval tradition to catch a unicorn was with the help of a vestal virgin: upon seeing the virgin, the unicorn would become gentle and lay his head on her lap (Figures 3 and 4). This motif was understood to be an allegory of the Christ and the Virgin, and also as an example of how love softens the fiercest of men.

The unicorn was also a symbol of purity. It was believed that when the unicorn stooped to drink from a pool and dipped its horn into the water, the water was purified and rendered sweet. Furthermore, the unicorn's horn was believed to remove poison. As a result, cups and other instruments allegedly



**Figure 1** The royal coat-of-arms of the United Kingdom (after Wikipedia commons)



*Hec animalia sunt veraciter depicta sicut vidimus in terra sancta*

**Figure 2** The unicorn and other animals seen in the Holy Land in the 15th century (after Breydenbach 1486, reproduced in Einhorn 1976: 126, Figure 7)

made of unicorn horn were used to test the food of kings and nobles for poison. Rhinoceros horn and the long tusk of the narwhal (the horn of "sea-unicorn") were highly prized articles of trade, made

into talismanic amulets and rings, and ground into medicinal powder<sup>3</sup>.

## 2. The unicorn and the virgin in the Physiologus

The bulk of European unicorn lore is derived from three primary sources of classical antiquity. The most recent of these is the *Physiologus*, a collection of the wonders of natural history written in Greek about 200 CE in Alexandria in Egypt<sup>4</sup>, which was an important center of trade between India and the western world at that time. Containing the first Christian interpretation of the unicorn myth, the *Physiologus* mentions the 'capture by means of a virgin' motif. A significant detail is that after its capture, the virgin leads the unicorn into the palace for the king (Figure 5). While this is not found in earlier classical sources, it is attested in both Indian and Mesopotamian traditions (see below).

"About the Unicorn. The Psalm [91 (92): 11] says: 'And my horn [tò kèras mou] will be raised as (that) of the of the unicorn [hōs monokérōtos].' The *Physiologus* ['the Naturalist'] said about the unicorn that it has this very nature: it is a very little animal, looking like a kid, but very bitter. The hunter cannot approach it because of its enormous strength; it has a single horn in the middle of the head. How can it be caught? They dispose in front of it an undefiled [clothed] maiden, and (the unicorn) leaps upon her bosom [eis tòn kólpon, also 'womb'], and the maiden suckles the animal and leads it into the palace for the king [eis tō palátion tōi basilei].

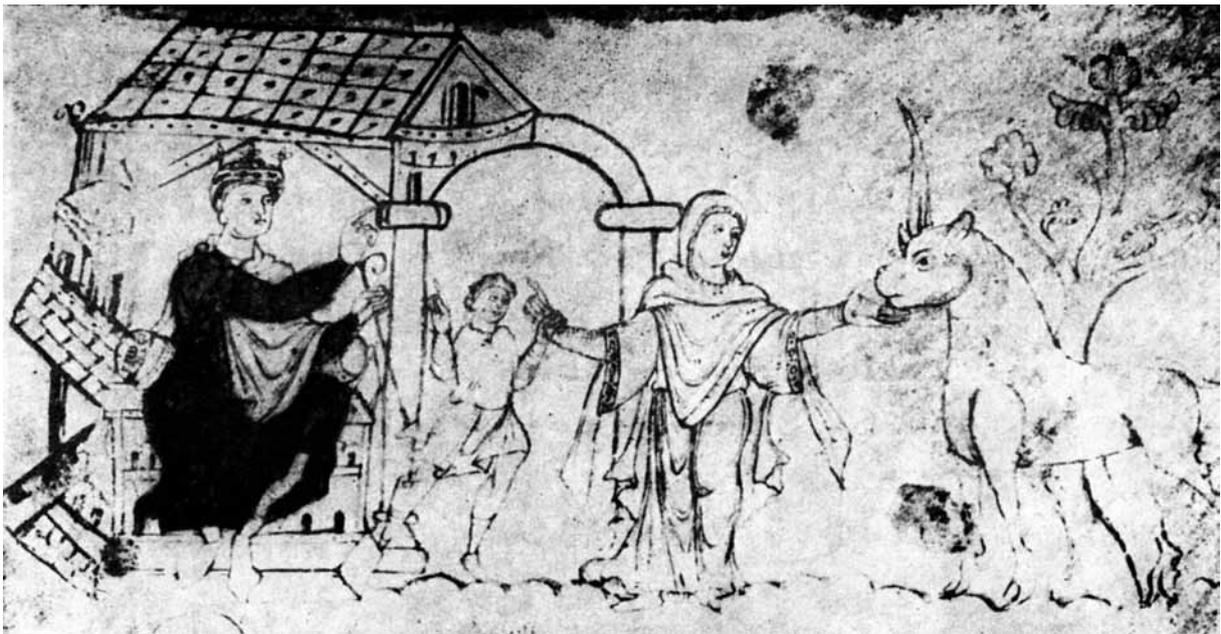
Then it is assumed that (this) animal (is) an image of the Saviour, in fact: '(he) raised a horn in the home of David, our father' [Luke 1: 16], and it became for us a horn of safety. The



**Figure 3** A unicorn lays his head on the lap of a virgin and is killed. Illustration in an Italian 14th century bestiary manuscript in the Royal collection (973,12) of the British Museum (after Shepard 1930: Plate 2)



**Figure 4** Virgin, unicorn and hunter in a German embroidery from c.1375 (after *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 9, 1910: 309)



**Figure 5** A virgin leads the captured unicorn into the palace for the king (after a medieval manuscript of the *Physiologus* in Schlingloff 1973: Figure 2)

angels and the powers might not rule over him, but he has taken abode in the womb of the true and undefiled virgin Maria [the Mother of God], 'and the Word has become flesh and has taken abode among us' [John 1: 14].<sup>5</sup>"

The Psalm is quoted from the Greek translation

of the Old Testament known as the *Septuaginta*, assembled in Alexandria between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE<sup>6</sup>. In eight places, the Hebrew word *r'ēm* (plural *rēmīm*) 'wild (urus) bull' (cf. Akkadian *rīmu* 'wild bull') was translated with the term *monókerōs* 'unicorn', which was then rendered in the Latin *Vulgate* translation as *unicornis* and in Hiob as

*rhinocerus*<sup>7</sup>.

The following passage is only found in a 14th century manuscript (Codex B) of the Physiologus:

About the unicorn (*monókerōs*). There is an animal called unicorn; in those places there is a large lake (where) the wild animals come together to drink. But before the beasts have gathered together, a serpent arrives and pours down its own venom in the water. Then the wild animals, having taken perception of the poison, do not dare to drink, but wait for the unicorn; it comes and soon enters the lake, having formed (the image of) a cross with its horn, destroys the strength of the poison, and while it drinks from the water all those animals also can drink.

(This is) its second nature: this animal — I mean the unicorn — loves very much the joy. Then what do the people who want to catch him do? They take with themselves drums, trumpets, kinnors and everything [that] has been invented by men; they go to the place where the animal is, and start to dance, playing the trumpets and anything else they have with them, heavily crying aloud during the dance. Having placed a woman in another place close to them, they adorn her and give her a chain bound to the tree. Then the unicorn, hearing the big noises of men and of the trumpets, advances near to the place, sees and hears whatever they are doing, but does not dare to approach them. When it sees the woman alone, apparently sleeping, it advances to leap over her and rubs on her knees, and while the woman calms it, (the unicorn) falls asleep. Then she binds it to the chain and thus leaves it and goes away. The unicorn, when it wakes up and realises to be no longer capable of walking, being in fact held by the chain, by continuously skinning loses its horn and frees

itself; then the hunters keep it (i.e. the horn). It is useful against the poison of the snake<sup>8</sup>.

The *Kyranides*, a collection of writing attributed to Hermes Trismegistos in the first centuries of the Christian era, has transmitted a tradition related to the description of the unicorn in the Physiologus, explicitly connecting it with the rhinoceros:

About the rhinoceros. 1. The rhinoceros is a quadruped animal resembling the deer, with a single enormous horn in place of the nose. It cannot be otherwise caught, if not with the sweet oil and beauty of well-dressed women. In fact it is amorous. 2. The stone which is found inside the nose or the horn of this (animal), when carried, chases away the demons. 3. Its testicles given to drink, or its sexual organ, to the highest degree stimulates the intercourse for men and women<sup>9</sup>.

### 3. The unicorn of Ctesias and Megasthenes

The oldest classical source belongs to the Greek historian Ctesias. Even in antiquity Ctesias had a bad reputation as an author of pure fiction, but this seems to be mainly due to his uncritical credulity and predilection for the marvelous; in many cases he has preserved valuable details of oriental legends<sup>10</sup>. His account of the unicorn is a case in point. Trained at the famous medical school of Cnidos, Ctesias served the Persian king Artaxerxes II Mnemon as court physician for some 17 years. After his return to Greece in 398/397 BCE he wrote two major works, *Persica* and *Indica*. Unfortunately these have survived only in fragmentary quotations by other classical authors, and in summaries compiled in the ninth century by Photius, the patriarch of Constantinople. The unicorn fills chapter 45 in

Photius' summary of Indica:

In India there are wild asses [*ónoi ágríoi*] as large as horses, or even larger. Their body is white, their head dark red, their eyes bluish, and they have a horn in their forehead about a cubit in length. The lower part of the horn, for about two palms distance from the forehead, is quite white, the middle is black, the upper part, which terminates in a point, is a very flaming red. Those who drink out of cups made from it are proof against convulsions, epilepsy, and even poison, provided that before or after having taken it they drink some wine or water or other liquid out of these cups. The domestic and wild asses of other countries and all other solid-hoofed animals have neither huckle-bones nor gall-bladder, whereas the Indian asses have both. Their huckle-bone is the most beautiful that I have seen, like that of the ox in size and appearance; it is as heavy as lead and of the color of cinnabar all through. These animals are very strong and swift; neither the horse nor any other animal can overtake them. At first they run slowly, but the longer they run their pace increases wonderfully, and becomes faster and faster. There is only one way of catching them. When they take their young to feed, if they are surrounded by a large number of horsemen, being unwilling to abandon their foals, they fight, butt with their horns, kick, bite, and kill many men and horses. They are at last taken, after they have been pierced with arrows and spears; for it is impossible to capture them alive. Their flesh is too bitter to eat, and they are only hunted for the sake of the horns and huckle-bones<sup>11</sup>.

The animal described by Ctesias in this passage has usually been taken to be the rhinoceros, which plays an important role in unicorn lore<sup>12</sup>. Yet at

least two real animals have been confounded here. One is certainly the wild ass; expressly and clearly mentioned, it is described as having a white body, being very strong and so swift that neither the horse nor any other animal can overtake it, and able to kick and bite viciously<sup>13</sup>. The unicorn's ability to purify poisoned water, mentioned in the later version of the Physiologus and apparently dating back to the Zoroastrian tradition of the Three-legged Ass (which has a single horn), seems to me to have a natural explanation in the wild ass's ability to drink brackish water.

Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador of Seleucus I, visited the Mauryan kingdom of Candragupta in the Gangetic Valley and its capital Pataliputra around 300 BCE. He wrote *Indica*, a work in four books which described India's geography and nature, the Indian society and religion. This work, too, is known only from fragments preserved in quotations and references. Although Megasthenes knew India from direct personal experience, he also included material from earlier Greek descriptions of India, including those of Ctesias<sup>14</sup>. In the following fragments it is not always clear if the information concerned ultimately comes from Ctesias or Megasthenes (or both)<sup>15</sup>.

Aelian's *De natura animalium* 16,20,3 reports about the unicorn:

And in these same regions there is said to exist a one-horned beast [*monókerōn*], which they call *Cartazonus*<sup>16</sup>. It is the size of a full-grown horse, has the mane of a horse, reddish hair, and is very swift of foot. Its feet are, like those of the elephant, not articulated and it has the tail of a pig. Between its eyebrows it has a horn growing out; it is not smooth but has spirals of quite natural growth, and is black in colour. This horn is said to be exceedingly sharp. And I am told that the creature has the most discordant and powerful voice of all animals.

When other animals approach, it does not object but is gentle; with its own kind however it is inclined to be quarrelsome. And they say that not only do the males instinctively butt and fight one another, but that they display the same temper towards the females, and carry their contentiousness to such a length that it ends only in the death of their defeated rival. The fact is that strength resides in every part of the animal's body, and the power of its horn is invincible. It likes lonely grazing-grounds where it roams in solitude, but at the mating season, when it associates with the female, it becomes gentle and the two even graze side by side. Later when the season has passed and the female is pregnant, the male Cartazonus of India reverts to its savage and solitary state. They say that the foals when quite young are taken to the King of the Prasii and exhibit their strength one against the other in the public shows, but nobody remembers a full-grown animal having been captured<sup>17</sup>.

Megasthenes is almost certainly the source of this fragment, because it mentions the King of the *Prasii* (= Sanskrit *Prācyāḥ*, 'the Easterners'), by which is meant Candragupta Maurya, Sandrokottos of Megasthenes. What is here said of the foals almost certainly relates to the wild asses; Aelian says practically the same thing about them in *De natura animalium* 16,9<sup>18</sup>.

Pliny in his *Naturalis Historia* (8,76) records the following:

"In India there are also solid-hoofed bulls that have a single horn, a beast called axis that has deer-skin having many and rather white spots ... but the most ferocious wild beast is the unicorn, whose body otherwise resembles the horse but whose head is like that of the deer, the legs like those of the elephant, the tail like

that of the boar, which has a heavy roar, and one black horn that projects two cubits from the middle of its forehead. They deny the possibility of catching this beast alive<sup>19</sup>.

Solinus in *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* (52,39-40) rephrases this:

But the most atrocious is the unicorn, a beast with a horrid roar. It has the body of the horse, the legs of an elephant, the tail of a pig, the head of a deer. From the middle of its forehead protrudes a horn that has miraculous splendour and is four feet long and so sharp that whatever it attacks is easily perforated with its puncture. It does not submit alive to human power; it can be killed, but not captured<sup>20</sup>.

Strabo in his *Geography* (15,1,56 p. 710-711) has preserved fragment 27b:

For he [Megasthenes] says that the monkeys are stone-rollers, and, haunting precipices, roll stones down upon their pursuers; and that most of the animals which are tame in our country are wild in theirs. And he mentions horses with one horn and the head of a deer (*híppous te légei monokérōtas elaphokránous*); and reeds, some straight up thirty fathoms in length, and others lying flat on the ground fifty fathoms, and so large that some are three cubits and others six in diameter<sup>21</sup>.

Aristotle, *De partibus animalium* 3,2,9 says:

Most of the horned animals are cloven-hoofed, though there is said to be one that is solid-hoofed, the Indian ass, as it is called [*hòn kaloúsin Indikòn ónon*]. The great majority of the horned animals have two horns, just as, in respect of the parts by which its movement

is effected, the body is divided into two—the right and the left. And the reason in both cases is the same. There are, however, some animals that have one horn only, e.g. the oryx (whose hoof is cloven) and the so-called Indian ass (whose hoof is solid). These creatures have their horn in the middle of the head<sup>22</sup>.

A variant of this is in Aristotle's *Historia animalium* 2,1 p. 446b:

Further, some animals are horned, some hornless. Most of the horned ones are cloven-hoofed, e.g., the ox, the deer, and the goat; we have seen no solid-hoofed animal with a pair of horns. But a few, e.g., the Indian ass, have a single horn and are solid-hoofed. The oryx has a single horn and cloven hooves. The only solid-hoofed animal with a huckle-bone is the Indian ass<sup>23</sup>.

Philostratus (c. 165-250 CE)<sup>24</sup> in his *Vita Apollonii* (3,2) remarks:

And they say that the wild asses [*toùs ónous de toùs agríous*] are also to be captured in these marshes, and these creatures have a horn upon the forehead, with which they butt like a bull and make a noble fight of it; the Indians make this horn into a cup, for they declare that no one can ever fall sick on the day on which he has drunk out of it, nor will any one who has done so be the worse for being wounded, and he will be able to pass through fire unscathed, and he is even immune from poisonous draughts which others would drink to their harm. Accordingly, this goblet is reserved for kings, and the king alone may indulge in the chase of this creature. And Apollonius says that he saw this animal, and admired its natural features; but when Damis asked him

if he believed the story about the goblet, he answered: 'I will believe it, if I find the king of the Indians hereabout to be immortal; for surely a man who can offer me or anyone else a draught potent against disease and so wholesome, will he not be much more likely to imbibe it himself, and take a drink out of this horn every day even at the risk of intoxication? For no one, I conceive, would blame him for exceeding in such cups.'<sup>25</sup>

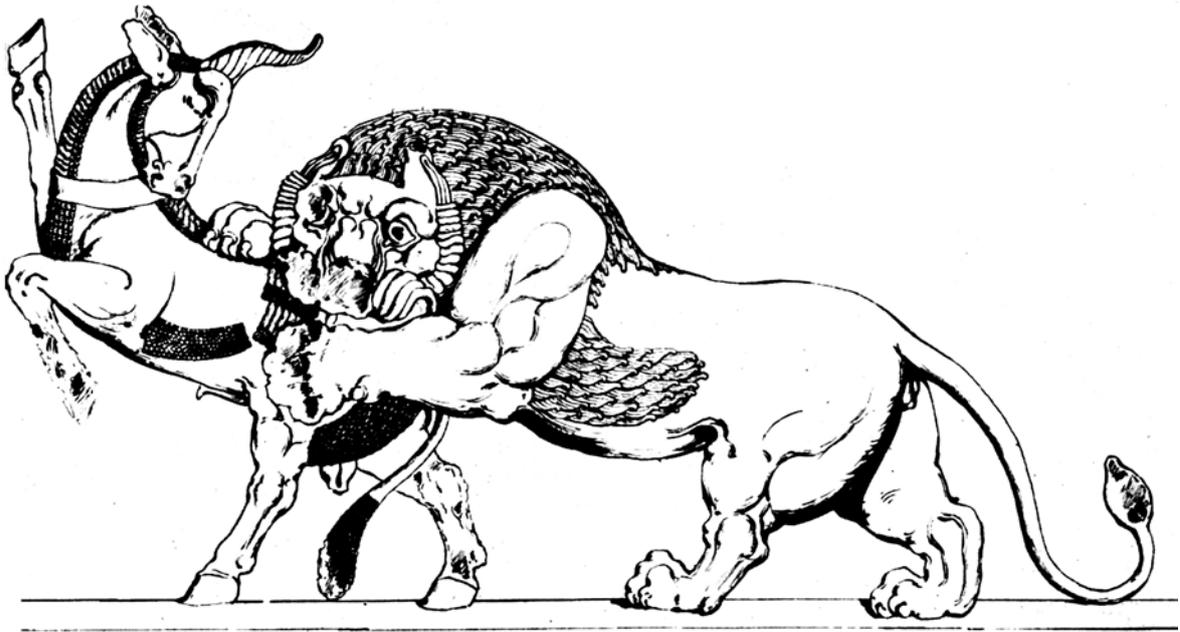
#### 4. The Iranian Bundahišn

Ctesias got his information on the Indian unicorn in the capital of Persia. As soon as the unicorn bulls of Persepolis (Figure 6) became known, Carsten Niebuhr (1778) connected them with the unicorn described by Ctesias/Aristotle, arguing that the artist had wanted to represent this beast. Eb. Schrader (1892) in turn proposed that Ctesias got his idea of the Indian unicorn from the sculptures that he would have seen in Susa or Persepolis. These views have been rejected<sup>26</sup>, but in my opinion there is an indirect connection (see section 10).

Ctesias' account of the horned wild ass and its purifying function has counterparts in Zoroastrian literature. These have as their background a single brief reference in the Avesta, namely Yasna 42,4: "we worship the pious Ass (*xara-*) which stands in the middle of the Sea Vourukaša"<sup>27</sup>.

The *Mēnōg ī Xrad* (62,26-27) notes:

"26. The Three-legged Ass<sup>28</sup> sits in the middle of the Sea Walkaš. 27. (It) completely polishes and purifies with (its) watchfulness (*pad wēnišn*) all the water which rains on the dead matter (*nasā*), on the menstruation (*daštān*) and on the other excrement (*hixr*) (—and on the filth—) when it arrives to the Three-legged Ass."<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 6** Lion attacks unicorn bull in a sculpture in Persepolis (after Shepard 1930: Plate 18)

The *Bundahišn* (ch. 24 D in Iran) contains a long and elaborate commentary:

"10. As regards the Three-legged Ass, (He) says: 'It stands in the middle of the Sea Frāxwkard and has three feet, six eyes, nine testicles, two ears, one horn, a dark-blue head, white body, and spiritual food, (and he is) holy. 11. And of those its six eyes, two are in the eye-sockets, two on the top of the head, two on the hump, and by means of those six eyes it overcomes [the danger and] the worst destruction. 12. And of those nine testicles, three are on the head, three on the hump, and three inside the flanks; and each testicle is as large as a house and as big as the Mount Xvanvant (in Pāzand). 13. And when each one of those three feet has been placed, it covers as much ground as when a thousand sheep sit down in a circle by sitting together; a pastern of (its) foot is such as a thousand men with horses and a thousand chariots can pass in through. 14. And those two ears surround the districts of Māzandarān. 15. That one horn is as it were golden and

hollow (or, golden like a horn-trumpet). Another thousand horns have grown therefrom, some of which are as big as a camel, some (are) as big as a horse, some as big as an ox and some as big as an ass, great as well as small; by means of that horn it destroys and shatters all that worst pest of the fighting *xrafstars*. 16. When that Ass takes a round in the sea (and) bends its ears, all the waters of the Sea Frāxwkard furiously tremble, (and) (its) sides and centre are in turmoil. 17. When it brays, all the Ohrmazdean female water-creatures become pregnant, and all the pregnant *xrafstars* of the water, when they hear that bray, cast as corpses (their young). 18. When it stales in the sea, all the water in the seas — which is in the seven Kišwars of the earth — becomes purified. For this reason all the asses, when they see water, they stale in it.' 19. As (He) says: 'If the Three-legged Ass would not have purified the water, all the waters would have perished because of the contamination which the Evil Spirit (*Gannāg Mēnōg*) had brought on the water for the death of the creatures

of Ohrmazd. 20. Tištar can seize more water from the sea with the assistance of the Three-legged Ass. And ambergris — it is known — is the dung of the Three-legged Ass; for, (even) if its food is mostly spiritual, the moisture and the nutrition of the water goes to (its) body through the pores and (the Three-legged Ass) casts (it) away as urine and dung."<sup>30</sup>

The Tištar mentioned here is the star Sirius, who in the Iranian tradition is the liberator of waters (comparable to Vedic Indra, the god of thunder and war)<sup>31</sup>. Tištar's association with the Three-legged Ass is also mentioned in the Iranian version of the Bundahišn in chapter 21,5-6:

"5. When it rains owing to the defilement of the demons with excess and deficiency, (and with) harm, damage and contamination of the various divisions (of the earth), Tištar takes water from the entire Frāxwkard Sea. 6. As (He) says: 'The Three-legged Ass, which causes to move (the waters) in the Frāxwkard Sea, and agitates all the water of the sea, pours down the water on the sides of the sea. Tištar descends with the help of the *frawahr* of the right ones and also of the other celestial divinities'."<sup>32</sup>

The ass is also linked with atmospheric phenomena in the *Pahlavi Rewāyat* accompanying the *Dādestān ī Dēnīg* (35a5-6):

"5. (Zoroaster asked:) 'What (is) this thunderbolt which falls from the cloud?'  
6. Ohrmazd said: 'This is a stone; when the cloud draws (up) water (from the sea), through the power of the wind and the movement of the Three-legged Ass which stands in the middle of the sea, it [i.e. the water] goes up (to) the atmosphere and burns and is heated severely, when it falls on men and beneficent

animals it kills them, and Ahriman becomes more oppressive."<sup>33</sup>

James Darmesteter has assumed that the Three-legged Ass is a celestial animal, whose urine is rain possessed with the power to kill demons. Darmesteter points out that this mythical animal of Iran thus corresponds to the heavenly bull, which many peoples have imagined as urinating rain<sup>34</sup>.

The Three-legged Ass's purification of water by means of its horn has been compared to Atharvaveda (*Śaunaka-Saṃhitā*) 3,7,1-2, where the horn (*viṣāṇā-*) of the swift-running gazelle (*bariṇa-*) is a remedy against a disease<sup>35</sup>.

While discussing the Ṛgvedic references to the wild ass, I maintained that whenever *gaura-* is mentioned as a real animal, it denotes the 'wild ass'. "From references to real animals I exclude RV 4,58,2-3, which speaks of melted butter as a bull (*vṛṣabhā-*) that has four horns, three legs, two heads and seven hands, calling it a 'four-horned *gaura*'."<sup>36</sup> This mythical wild ass of the Ṛgveda with its three legs is rather similar to the Three-legged Ass of the Bundahišn!

The Iranian Three-legged Ass is a "hyper-phallic animal", "with its 9 (pair of) testicles" and "its three legs clearly an allusion to its virile member, as in the case of the three-legged Priapus"<sup>37</sup>. Priapus was not only a three-legged phallic god, but also an ass-god<sup>38</sup>.

## 5. An Indian 'unicorn' (*ekaśṛṅga*): The Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend

Ever since 1875, the European lore of capturing the unicorn by means of a maiden (which dates back to the Physiologus) has been connected with the Indian Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend<sup>39</sup>. The principal variants of this legend are found in the Mahābhārata (3,110-113), the Rāmāyaṇa (1,8-10), the Padma-

Purāṇa (Pātāla-khaṇḍa 13), the Skanda-Purāṇa, Kṣemendra's Bhāratamañjarī (3,758-795), the Alambusā-Jātaka (Jātaka no. 523), the Naḷinikā-Jātaka (Jātaka no. 526), the Mahāvastu (141-152), the Bhadrakalpāvadāna (33), Kṣemendra's Bodhisattvāvadānakalpalatā (65), the Kanjur (IV, Dulva, fol. 136-137), and the Jaina legend of Valkalacīrin in Vasudevahiṇḍī (16,16-50,2, quoted verbatim in Āvaśyaka-Cūrṇi 456-460), found also in the Āvaśyaka-niryukti (1164), and in Hemacandra's Sthavirāvalīcarita, Paṛiśiṣṭaparvan (1,90-258); in addition, there are numerous short passages in various texts and Chinese translations of Buddhist texts. There are several extensive and penetrating studies of the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend<sup>40</sup>. I present here a selection of variants in already published summaries; my own contribution to the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga research follows, in studies of the legend's Vedic and Harappan background (see also section 13).

Among the oldest versions are two Jātaka texts. No. 523 repeats the theme of an ascetic's seduction by a prostitute, which is quite prominent in Indian literature, and which implies the concept that an ascetic who remains celibate accumulates creative power for himself.

"A Brahmin ascetic lived in the forest. A doe drank water mixed with his semen, fell in love with him, and gave birth to a male child named Isisinga [= Pāli form of Sanskrit Ṛṣyaśṛṅga 'Antelope-horn']. When the boy came of age, his father warned him against the wiles of women, initiated him into the practice of asceticism, and died. Isisinga practiced such fierce asceticism that Indra [the king of gods], fearing that the sage would depose him, sent the *apsaras* [heavenly nymph] Alambusā to seduce him. When Isisinga saw her, he immediately desired her and pursued her; she embraced him and his chastity was destroyed. For three years he made love to her, but then

he came to his senses and realized that he had neglected his duties. He gave up the path of desire, and he forgave and blessed the *apsaras*. When she returned to heaven, Indra offered to grant her any wish, and she chose never to be made to tempt another sage."<sup>41</sup>

No. 526 includes the theme of drought that is found in most versions:

"Indra feared that the powers of a certain great sage posed a threat to him, so he sent an *apsaras* to seduce the sage, who shed his seed at the sight of her. A gazelle ate some grass and water mixed with the sage's seed and became pregnant. She brought forth a son named Isisinga, who was raised by the sage in seclusion in the forest (Figure 7).

Isisinga performed such great *tapas* [asceticism, literally '(solar) heat'] that Indra



**Figure 7** Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's conception and birth from a doe  
A medallion at the stūpa of Bhārhut, second century BCE  
(after Sivaramamurti 1981: Figure 46)

was shaken and determined to break down his virtue. For three years Indra sent no rain, advising the king, 'Send your daughter Naḷinikā to break the virtue of Isisinga and it will rain, for his fierce *tapas* has caused the rain to stop.' She went to him and enticed him, and he thought her to be some marvellous ascetic. His virtue was overcome, his meditation broken off, and he made love to her. Then she ran away from him, and Indra sent rain that day. Isisinga longed for Naḷinikā, still thinking that she had been an ascetic, until his father realized from Isisinga's tale that a woman had broken his virtue. He told his son, 'This was a female demon. You must always avoid them.' Then Isisinga returned to his meditation."<sup>42</sup>

In the Kanjur version, it is quite clear that the drought is due to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's ascetic powers, and that the drought ends in rain when he is seduced to shed his seed:

"One day when Ṛṣyaśṛṅga was carrying a pitcher of water, rain fell in such torrents that the pitcher broke. In anger, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga cursed the gods to send no rain for twelve years. Famine arose, and the priests told the king, 'This drought is due to the anger of a sage. If his *tapas* is destroyed, Indra will send rain.' The king sent his daughter, Śāntā, to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, who gave himself up to pleasure with the woman, and his magic power vanished. Rain fell. Śāntā, having conquered the sage with love, brought him to the king, who gave her to him as his wife."<sup>43</sup>

In a version preserved in the Chinese Tripitaka, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga is called Ekaśṛṅga 'Unicorn'<sup>44</sup> (Figure 8) and Śāntā is the name of a courtesan (Figure 9)<sup>45</sup>:

"The sage Ekaśṛṅga [Ṛṣyaśṛṅga] had obtained

the five supernatural faculties [*abhijñās*]. One day when the rain had made the ground slippery on the mountain where he lived, the



**Figure 8** Ṛṣyaśṛṅga dressed in barkcloth (*valkala*) garment of a celibate student with a single horn on his forehead. Stūpa relief from the Caubārā mound near Mathurā, now in the Mathurā Museum (after Sivaramamurti 1981: Figure 45)



**Figure 9** Illustration of the R̥ṣyaśṛṅga legend at Mathurā: (above) women going to the hermitage in a ship, (middle) conversation with the seductress, (below) seduction (after Schlingloff 1973: Figure 6)

sage slipped and fell; and, since he had the feet of a deer and was clumsy, he injured one of his feet. Irritated, he used a magic formula to prevent the Nāgas from sending rain for twelve years. A great famine arose, and the king of Benares proclaimed, 'If anyone can make this

hermit fall from his supernatural faculties and become an ordinary subject, I will give him half of my kingdom.' ... Śāntā, a courtesan, took 500 of her women to the forest, where they plied the sage with wine and 'pills of joy'. They all bathed together, and when the women touched him, Ekaśṛṅga conceived sensual desires in his heart. He lost all of his supernatural faculties, and rain fell from the sky for seven days and seven nights."<sup>46</sup>

In the Mahābhārata, a prostitute brings R̥ṣyaśṛṅga to the palace of the king:

"An *apsaras* was cursed to become a female deer and to remain in this form until she bore a son to a sage. One day the sage Vibhāṇḍaka, the son of Kaśyapa, caught sight of another *apsaras* and shed his seed. The female deer drank his seed and bore R̥ṣyaśṛṅga, who had a horn on his head.

Years later, a certain king transgressed against a Brahmin, and so Indra sent no rain in his land. The king's ministers advised him to bring to the palace the sage R̥ṣyaśṛṅga, who had lived in complete chastity in the forest all his life and had never seen a woman. They said, 'If R̥ṣyaśṛṅga may be enticed and lured into your kingdom, Indra will send rain immediately.' The king sent a prostitute to the forest, and R̥ṣyaśṛṅga, thinking her to be a new, delightful sort of ascetic, invited her to perform *tapas* with him. She served him and plied him with garlands, drinks, and embraces, until he was overpowered with love for her, emotionally aroused, and maddened with passion. When he described to his fathers the qualities of this 'ascetic', 'his' beautiful 'rosaries' (garlands) and 'matted locks' (long hair perfumed and bound with gold), his father warned him against such demons. Nevertheless, the young ascetic took

advantage of his father's temporary absence and followed the prostitute to the women's quarters of the palace, and the rain fell. The king gave his daughter, Śāntā, to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga in marriage.

When Vibhāṇḍaka returned and saw that his son had gone, he became furious and went to the palace to burn the king with his *tapas*. The king, however, having foreseen the wrath of Vibhāṇḍaka, had given much land and cattle to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, and when Vibhāṇḍaka saw his son's wealth he was pacified. He said to Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, 'When a son is born, let the two of you come to the forest.' Ṛṣyaśṛṅga agreed, and he later returned to the woods, with his wife Śāntā, to become a forest-dweller."<sup>47</sup>

Virtually the same story is told in the first book of the Rāmāyaṇa (chapter 8), with an expansion on the methods by which the courtesans succeeded in bringing Ṛṣyaśṛṅga (chapter 9). The epic goes on to describe (in chapters 10-17) how the childless King Daśaratha invites Ṛṣyaśṛṅga to perform the horse sacrifice on his behalf and then the son-producing sacrifice (*putrīyeṣṭi*). In this latter ritual, the king's three queens are given divinely charged porridge to eat, which impregnates them and causes them to give birth to four sons<sup>48</sup>. In the Buddhist Mahāvastu, the drought motif is missing, but instead the king has Ekaśṛṅga brought to him in order to have offspring. As a result, the queens give birth to a hundred sons, and the king's daughter to 32 sons<sup>49</sup>.

The Jaina version in Saṅghadāsa's Vasudevahiṇḍī also involves seduction by a prostitute, but here the hero is the lost brother of the king (and he is not horned):

"A boy Valkalacīrin ['clothed in bark garments'] lives in a hermitage with his father who is not a brahmin ascetic but an abdicated king. On growing old, he had handed over

his kingdom to the eldest son and had taken abode in the jungle with his wife. The queen died after the birth of her son Valkalacīrin. Hence the boy has grown up in the solitude of the jungle educated by only his father. He has never seen a female. However, his brother, the reigning king of the country, is longing for him. He sends courtesans to the hermitage who infatuate the boy with female charm and sweets. They make their escape before the father returns. Valkalacīrin goes in search of the so-called ascetics and finally reaches the city of the king. He arrives at the house of the courtesans and is washed and dressed by them. Finally his brother the king finds him, receives him with great joy and gives him in marriage."<sup>50</sup>

All the known versions of the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga date from the post-Vedic period: "Though Lüders believes that there may be some old elements contained in the name Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, there is no Vedic text to support this epic legend."<sup>51</sup> In fact, Lüders (1940: 1) pointed out that the name occurs in the teacher genealogies of the two Sāmavedic schools. According to the Jaiminīya-Upaniṣad-Brāhmaṇa (3,40), Ṛṣyaśṛṅga<sup>52</sup> Kāśyapa received the immortal *gāyatra sāman* [ritual song] from Kāśyapa (who had learnt it from Indra) and in turn handed it down to Devataras Śyāvasāyana Kāśyapa. In the Vaṃsa-Brāhmaṇa of the Kauthuma-Rāṇāyaniya school, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga Kāśyapa is the son and pupil of Kāśyapa and the father and teacher of Vibhāṇḍaka<sup>53</sup>. In addition, Lüders felt sure that this Sāmavedic Ṛṣyaśṛṅga can be considered to be the same person as the Ṛśya, who in the Ārṣeya-Brāhmaṇa (3,6,10 in the Kauthuma version, 1,9,2 in the Jaiminīya version) is mentioned as the seer of a *sāman* in the Āraṇyaka-Gāna<sup>54</sup>.

I would like to expand here on this *sāman*<sup>55</sup> and the context in which it is used in the Vedic

ritual, given its relevance to the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend. In the Kauthuma-Rāṇāyānīya school of Sāmaveda, this sāman is recorded in Āraṇyaka-Gāna 5,1,22<sup>56</sup>. Its name is *Ṛṣyasya vratam*, but according to the Jaiminīya school of Sāmaveda, either *Ṛṣyasya vratam* or *Bhūtecchandāsām vratam*<sup>57</sup>, its seer is Kaśyapa, its metre anuṣṭubh, and its deity Indra. The first part of the sāman is composed on the verse recorded in Āraṇyaka-Saṃhitā 4,9 and in Jaiminīya-Saṃhitā 2,4,3<sup>58</sup>; the second part, which is composed on chanted interjections (*stobha*) that do not form regular phrases, is recorded in Stobhagrantha 2,6<sup>59</sup> and in Jaiminīya-Saṃhitā 2,4,4<sup>60</sup>. These stobhas start with the word *ṛṣyāsah* '(O) antelope bulls', followed by vocatives addressed to Indra that are separated by the interjection<sup>61</sup> *bhuñ*, which is undoubtedly derived from the verbal root *bhuj-* 'to enjoy'<sup>62</sup>.

According to Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa 5,4,13, with the chant of Ṛṣya they address the *gārbapatya* [fire(place)].<sup>63</sup> The text goes on to explain this in 14: "All beings (once upon a time) praised Indra with a chant; Ṛṣya noted that one of his (viz. Indra's) members had been omitted in (these) chants; praising that one member, he reached the place dear to Indra. Through this (chant) they reach the place dear to Indra." The medieval commentator Sāyaṇa clarifies that by the "one member" (*ekam aṅgam*)<sup>64</sup> is meant "the secret place of enjoyment" (*bhogasādanam guhyarūpam*), undoubtedly the male organ<sup>65</sup>. Sāyaṇa also quotes a passage from the Śātyāyanaka (i.e., the lost earlier version of the Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa); the passage quoted is actually found in JB 2,403, though with slightly variant readings<sup>66</sup>. The key passage is difficult to interpret, but seems to gloss the immediately preceding verse composed with stobhas. Its final phrase describes "Indra who has his shuttle cleansed (*trasarapūta-*)". Indra is "one who has his 'shuttle' (the stick that goes back and forth in the act of weaving) (*tasara-* or *trasara-*)<sup>67</sup> again and again<sup>68</sup> in the 'buttocks'<sup>69</sup>. The meaning of this is further clarified in the Jaiminīya-

Brāhmaṇa with the explanation that his unpraised single member was in the 'buttock' (*sphigau, locative*)<sup>70</sup>.

This ritual chant of Ṛṣya belongs to the last part of the thirteen sāmāparimāds sung around the sacrificial area. They form an extension of the mahāvratā laud chanted at noon on the mahāvratā day at the end of a year-long sacrificial session. At this juncture, various rarely performed ritual actions take place, in particular the sexual union of a prostitute (*punṣcalū*) and a student of religion (*brahmabandhu*) who hails from the eastern country of Magadha. This action is prescribed in the Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa (2,404) and in the Jaiminīya-Śrautasūtra<sup>71</sup>, but not in the Pañcaviṃśa-Brāhmaṇa; the Śāṅkhāyana-Śrautasūtra (17,6,2) prohibits its performance as an obsolete practice<sup>72</sup>. The participants are supposed to scold each other (for scolding is a purifying activity). The prostitute blames the student for breaking his vow of celibacy, while the student mocks the prostitute for cleansing every man's member<sup>73</sup>.

The antiquity and agricultural affinity of the religious conceptions and practices connected with the ritual intercourse of the celibate student and the prostitute in the mahāvratā and in the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend can be gleaned from a verse in the Atharvaveda (Śaunaka-Saṃhitā 11,5,12; Paippalāda-Saṃhitā 16,154,2): "Roaring, thundering, the ruddy, whitefooted<sup>74</sup> [*brahmacārin*] has inserted a great penis into the ground. The *brahmacārin* pours semen over the surface, the earth. By that the four directions live."<sup>75</sup> The term for the student's celibate asceticism is *tapas*, literally '(solar) heat': it parallels the scorching heat of the sun, which culminates at the summer solstice (quite probably the day on which the mahāvratā was celebrated)<sup>76</sup>. The monsoon rains which end the long period of drought are symbolized by the celibate ascetic's shedding of his seed in the "divine union" of the sky and earth that is crucial for farming and animal

husbandry. In archaic farming communities, it was common to perform ritual sexual unions as primitive fertility magic to induce rain<sup>77</sup>.

## 6. The Gilgamesh epic of Mesopotamia

The Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend was first compared with the Enkidu and Hierodule episode of the Gilgamesh epic by Edward Lehmann in a personal communication to Hugo Gressmann, published in 1911<sup>78</sup>. Peter Jensen, who translated the Gilgamesh epic, believed that the Indian legend was derived from it<sup>79</sup>, but his enthusiastic inclination to ascribe a Mesopotamian origin to most of mankind's cultural achievements was not the best endorsement for his opinions. Nevertheless, we can affirm that "the hypothesis of the correspondence of the Indian tale to the Gilgamesh epic is highly probable"<sup>80</sup> and even that "the cycle of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga with its variants cannot be separated from that of Enkidu; the patterns of both cycles show too many parallels and no historical, geographic or cultural element prohibits such a connection."<sup>81</sup>

The hero of the world's oldest epic is Gilgamesh

(Gilgāmeš), the legendary fifth ruler of the Sumerian city of Uruk. He likely lived between 2800 and 2600 BCE, but was later considered to be a divinity, along with his friend and companion Enkidu (Enkīdu) (Figure 10). Sumerian epic poems were at first oral; some half dozen separate works were first written down in Sumerian around 2100-2000 BCE. The actual Gilgamesh epic was composed in Akkadian in the Old Babylonian period (c 1600 BCE). The epic evolved over time into its Standard version (divided into tablets I-XII), which was probably composed around 1250 BCE. Yet it mainly came to be known from the cuneiform tablets of the library of King Assurbanipal (668-627 BCE) in Niniveh. Copies of the epic were made even after this, the latest known dating from 130 BCE. The oldest Sumerian poems recount the feats of the heroic king, with Enkidu as his servant. In the Standard Babylonian version, however, Gilgamesh is a mystic searching for eternal life. Enkidu is the friend and "brother" whose death greatly shocks the hero<sup>82</sup>.

In tablet I, the goddess Aruru takes clay and throws it to the steppe, thus creating the wild man Enkidu in order to control Gilgamesh, the arrogant king of Uruk. Enkidu's whole body was covered with



**Figure 10** Gilgamesh and Enkidu killing the monster Humbaba. Impression of cylinder seal VA4215 in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (after Simo Parpola 1997a: cover)

hair. He did not know any human beings, but ate grass with the gazelles and cattle and came to drink at the river with the herds. A hunter who saw him at the drinking place was horrified. Telling his father of this terrifically strong wild man who had prevented his hunting by filling the trap pits and by tearing the trap snares, he confessed that he dared not try to stop him. On his father's advice, the hunter went to Uruk to petition Gilgamesh for aid. The king had been counseled in dream by his divine mother that he would be finding a strong companion and friend from the steppe. The hunter was sent home with the prostitute (*harimtu*) Shamhat, who seduced Enkidu. After the wild man had had sex with her for six days and seven nights, his strength was sapped and the gazelles ran away from him. Shamhat told him about Gilgamesh and his dream, and led him to the city of Uruk.

In tablet I, Enkidu's mother is the goddess Aruru. But tablet VIII gives a variant genealogy, which is rather striking in relation to the unicorn myths<sup>83</sup>: "Enkidu, your mother, the gazelle (*šabītu*), and your father, the wild ass (*akkannu*), have generated you."<sup>84</sup> In the same tablet (lines 49-50), Gilgamesh addresses Enkidu as follows: "Enkidu, O my friend, rejected mule (*kūdanu ʿardu*)<sup>85</sup>, wild ass (*akkannu*) of the mountains, panther (*nimru*) of the steppe."

The wild ass was much admired for its strength and sexual potency, and in both respects corresponds to Enkidu's qualities. In tablet I (lines 161-162), the prostitute Shamhat "saw him, the primordial man, the young whose sexual virility (comes) from the deep of the steppe."<sup>86</sup>

## 7. The Harappan 'unicorn': is it a real or a fabulous animal and does it come from Western Asia?

With thousands of occurrences, the so-called

'unicorn bull' (Figure 11) is by far the most frequently occurring iconographic motif of the Indus seals<sup>87</sup>. The first published report of excavations at Mohenjo-daro naturally referred to the "Indian one-horned ox" described by the classical Greek and Roman authors<sup>88</sup>. It was also clear from the beginning that the Sumerian seals with their unicorn bulls constituted another parallel to the Indus unicorns. But are they really related? Did the Harappans borrow the unicorn motif from Western Asia or did they invent it on their own?<sup>89</sup> In addition to these questions, there is one more much discussed and still debated issue: does the 'unicorn' represent a real or a fantastic animal? The question is quite relevant: some Indus seals depict clearly fantastic beasts, whose bodies are made up of body parts belonging to two or more different animals, some of which (like the elephant) are clearly South Asian<sup>90</sup> (Figure 12)<sup>91</sup>.

One early opinion on these topics was formulated as follows:

"The favourite animal ... was the beast shown with one horn only. ... It is not yet certain that this animal was purposely represented as having a single horn; in all probability, owing to the difficulty of drawing in perspective, one horn is supposed to be behind the other. This method of portraying horns is well known on archaic Sumerian seals, the same animal being indifferently portrayed with two horns or one. For instance, [seals] Nos. 234 and 359 [in Mackay 1938: II] distinctly show an animal, which is definitely of the type that is usually portrayed with one horn, possessed of two horns though of a rather different shape."<sup>92</sup>

The two seals referred to here are illustrated in Figures 13 and 14.

John Marshall made sound statement on several basic issues concerning the Indus unicorn. Referring



**Figure 11** Unicorn bull on seal M-18 from Mohenjo-daro  
(after CISI 1: 377)



**Figure 12** Fabulous beast comprised of body parts  
belonging to different animals. Indus seal M-300  
(after CISI 3.1: 388)



**Figure 13** "Two-horned unicorn"  
on seal M-232 and its impression  
(after CISI 1: 57)



M-1077 A



M-1077 A bis



M-1077 a



M-1077 a bis

**Figure 14** "Two-horned unicorn" on seal M-1077 and its impression  
(after CISI 2: 109)

to a tablet from Harappa (see Figure 15), he wrote:

"This animal is depicted with two horns instead of one, and it is just within the bounds of possibility that the single horn is due merely

to the engravers having portrayed the animal in profile, with one horn concealed behind the other; in which case it may have belonged to some actual breed of cattle then familiar in the Indus Valley. Examples of two-horned animals



**Figure 15** "Two-horned unicorn" on tablet H-697 B

(after CISI 2: 316)

portrayed in this manner could, of course, readily be cited from other countries. If, however, we compare these unicorns with the buffaloes, gaurs, and humped bulls ... we see at once that the engravers of Mohenjo-daro (and it was the same at Harappā) made a practice of showing both horns, even when the animal was in profile, and that they could do this with consummate skill. In face of this we are bound, I think, to conclude that a one-horned creature is intended to be understood on these seals, and ... we must regard this creature as fabulous. The unicorn was, of course, a familiar creature of Indian folk stories, and Vishnu's title of *Ekaśrīṅga* 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. Whatever its origin, however, it seems clear from the large number of amulet seals on which this creature is portrayed that ... it was more popular than any other animal among the Indus people."<sup>93</sup>

Here "the difficulty of drawing in perspective" argument is effectively refuted<sup>94</sup>. The matter is clinched by the existence of several three-dimensional terracotta statuettes of 'unicorn' bulls with just one horn (Figure 16), while similar terracotta statuettes of the zebu bull, for instance, have two horns<sup>95</sup>. This undeniably proves that the Harappans intentionally and with preference represented this bovid animal with a single horn.

On the other hand, it is likewise undeniable that the above-mentioned two-horn variants<sup>96</sup> feature an animal that has two horns resembling those of the humped cattle, but in all other respects is similar to the 'unicorn' (including the distinctive "complicated, roughly heart-shaped decoration reaching from the withers to the top of the front legs"<sup>97</sup> and the occasional collar<sup>98</sup>, plus the presence of the 'cult stand' that is almost invariably placed in front of the 'unicorn' but only very exceptionally in front of other animals)<sup>99</sup>. In my opinion, these two-horned variants indicate, as Marshall suggested, some actual animal species that for ideological reasons was represented as a unicorn. The boar incarnation of Viṣṇu, also mentioned by Marshall, supplies a good parallel: the boar is a real animal, but is represented in images as having just one tusk. Likewise, the elephant-headed god Gaṇeśa reflects a real animal (i.e., the elephant), yet usually—but not always!— the elephant head of the deity has just one tusk. In order to better understand what emphasis on a single horn in the case of the unicorn bull might have meant to the Harappans, we shall examine these later Indian parallels in detail.

One broken round Indus seal from Mohenjo-daro, M-417 (Figure 17), shows animal foreparts (protomes) arranged in a whorl<sup>100</sup>. The animals preserved include the tiger, the Indian bison, the 'unicorn' bull, and the "'unicorn' with two zebu-like horns". The occurrence of both one- and two-horned bulls does not prove, as has been claimed, that they are two different animal species. Though in Mesopotamian iconography the bull is also often depicted with a single horn, the artists there were not prevented from representing the bull with two horns as well; both variants are found in one and the same picture. Nor does the predominance of unicornity in the Indus Valley prove that the Harappans did not copy the motif from Western Asia; to the contrary, it may work the other way around, since the same emphasis on unicornity is found there as well.

Considering the fact that the Harappans borrowed other art motifs from Mesopotamia, it seems more likely than not that they borrowed the motif of a single horn as well. The connection between the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend and the Gilgamesh epic adds to this likelihood.

## 8. The single horn in Indian mythology

The depiction of the 'unicorn bull' with a single horn is clearly intentional in the Indus Civilization and presumably also in ancient Western Asiatic<sup>101</sup> art, although this has not prevented representations of the bull with two horns in either context. The divinities and kings of many ancient peoples, including those of Western Asia and Egypt, wore horned headgear as symbols of power and strength. On warriors' helmets, bull horns represent destructive power, as the horns are the instruments with which the wild beast butts and tosses its adversary and tears up its body<sup>102</sup>. The bull and the goat, in particular, are paragons of male sexual power: the single horn is a device for emphasizing masculine prowess. The single 'horn' of the rhinoceros (called also *ekaśṛṅga-mṛga-* in Sanskrit)<sup>103</sup>

as a phallic symbol of erect virility<sup>104</sup> is highly esteemed as an aphrodisiac, not only in classical antiquity (see the Kyranides quoted in section 2) but also in Chinese medicine, where it is known as 'dragon's tooth' and is one of the "eight treasures"<sup>105</sup>. "Corno ['horn'] in Italian argot means phallus."<sup>106</sup> The male sex of the unicorn is emphasized in some Indus seals by the addition of testicles to a consistently prominent pizzle (penis)<sup>107</sup>. 'Horn' or 'tusk' in Sanskrit is *śṛṅga-*; and its derivative<sup>108</sup> *śṛṅgāra-* has as one of its principal meanings 'erotic love, sexual passion'<sup>109</sup>.

Shubhangana Atre (1985: 5-6), synthesizing ideas of Moti Chandra (1966), S. A. Dange (1970) and M. K. Dhavalikar (1983), has made the following valuable comment on the symbolism of the single horn with regard to the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend and the Harappan unicorn:

"Moti Chandra thinks that the horn [of sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga] must have been of an antelope as Ṛṣyaśṛṅga was born of a hind. The Ṛṣyaśṛṅga story also resembles the Sumerian story of Enkidu in the Gilgamesh epic. Enkidu, a half-human and half animal was born of a gazelle and was civilized by a courtesan. Significantly



**Figure 16** One-horned unicorn statuette from Chanhu-daro, now in Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (after Kenoyer 1998: 220 no. 132)



**Figure 17** Animal rhomb on seal M-417 (after CISI 1: 378)

unicorn also bears an antelope's horn on his forehead. Does this antelope / hind / gazelle motif run a common thread of symbolism binding these legends together? Dange ... points out that 'the ploughshare and the horn appear to be identified...' ... He is of the opinion that the sage Ṛṣyaśṛṅga probably did not have an original horn on the head but a horn was attached, in view of the belief in the power of fertility and virility in the horn. He has cited many examples where horn was used as a symbol of status and masculinity. He observes that the *bāśiṅga* (*dvi-śṛṅga*, literally two horns) of the bridegroom is indicative not only of his status but also is the sign of masculine power. Interestingly, Moti Chandra has arrived at a conclusion which can be supported by archaeological evidence also. He states, ' ... that the antelope horn at some distant past was used for tillage and therefore it symbolizes a good harvest bringing wealth in its turn.' Antlers have been found at Inamgaon, a chalcolithic site in Maharashtra which 'could have been used as a hand-plough because they are almost identical with that which was in use in Maharashtra in the last century. It was used more in hilly regions where it was made to work by dragging.' Once the horn is identified with a plough-share the phallic value of the horn-symbol no longer remains a mystery as to why the mythical unicorn should carry only one horn and combine the features of the animals belonging to the group of ruminants only. ... The association of a virgin with the unicorn is explained by the fact that mythologically the Earth is considered as the eternal virgin."

As the following myths demonstrate, the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend is not the only case in Indian tradition to support such a sexual connotation of the

single horn or tusk.

### ***The 'unicorn' bog: Prototypal ploughman and mate of the earth***

*Ekaśṛṅga-* and *ekaśṛṅgin-*<sup>110</sup> 'unicorn, having (just) a single tusk' is the epithet of the wild boar (*varāha-*) in the shape of which Viṣṇu lifted up the earth that had sunk into the nether regions<sup>111</sup>. In the iconographic representations of this myth, the boar is rarely depicted in animal shape; usually Viṣṇu appears as a man with the head of a boar (Figure 18)<sup>112</sup>. In the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the wild boar is not an incarnation of Viṣṇu, but a manifestation of the creator god *Brahmā*, who in this shape raised the earth from the primeval ocean<sup>113</sup>. This version dates back to early Vedic versions of the myth. According to the *Taittirīya-Saṃhitā*, "This (universe) was in the beginning just water. The creator god *Prajāpati* moved there in the shape of the wind. He saw this (earth). Having become a boar, he lifted it up. As *Viśvakarman* (the demiurge), he (*Prajāpati*) wiped her dry. She extended herself (*prath-*) and became 'the broad one', i.e. the earth (*pr̥thivī*)."<sup>114</sup> The *Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa* relates the story, similarly providing an etymology for another term for 'earth', namely *bhūmi*, which is derived from the root *bhū-* 'to become'<sup>115</sup>. According to the *Taittirīya-Āraṇyaka*, the boar which lifted up the earth was black and had a hundred (*TĀ* 10,1,8) or a thousand (*TĀ* 1,10,8) arms<sup>116</sup>. In the *Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa*, "a boar, called *Emūṣa*<sup>117</sup>, raised her [i.e., the earth] up, and he was her husband *Prajāpati*: with that mate, his favourite abode, he [i.e., the *Adhvaryu* priest taking earth dug up by a boar] thus supplies and completes him [i.e., *Prajāpati*]"<sup>118</sup>.

In the *Viṣṇu-Purāṇa* (5,29,23), the goddess Earth says to Viṣṇu after the god has killed the demon *Naraka* (his own son): "when you, assuming the form of a boar (*śūkara-*) lifted me up, this son, begotten through the contact with you, was born from me."<sup>119</sup> The relatively recent Śākta tantric text



**Figure 18** Boar-shaped Viṣṇu lifts Goddess Earth.  
Udayagiri, Madhya Pradesh, c. 400 CE  
(after Kramrisch 1954: Plate 47)

Kālikāpurāṇa<sup>120</sup> provides more details on this variant of the myth. The god Śiva blames Viṣṇu for having committed a transgression when in boar shape he violated the goddess Earth in the water, while she was having her monthly period. By the boar's seed the Earth became pregnant, and she carried in her womb a frightful embryo<sup>121</sup>. The gods tried to prevent the birth of this demonic son, which was engendered by sexual union with the Earth when she was in an impure state. The Earth suffered greatly, and was hardly able to bear the long delay<sup>122</sup>. Eventually a son, the demon Naraka, was born in the same sacrificial place<sup>123</sup>, that King Janaka ('Progenitor') tore up with his ploughshare (receiving from the resulting furrow his daughter Sītā

('Furrow'), who was given to him by the goddess Earth)<sup>124</sup>. Naraka was brought up by King Janaka as his adopted son.

The connection between the divine boar's "violation" of the earth (evidently with its single tusk) and the "tearing up" of soil by means of the ploughshare (associated with the sowing of seed in the field) makes it quite clear that the boar's tusk symbolizes the plough and the male organ<sup>125</sup>. The earth is spoken of here as *dharsitā* 'violated' by the boar (i.e., her husband) in a sexual sense: she becomes pregnant. In Sanskrit, the word *potra*—primarily denoting 'pig's snout'—is also used for the 'ploughshare'<sup>126</sup>, while *lāṅgala* 'plough' is also used for 'penis'<sup>127</sup>. In the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa (7,2,2,5), it is expressly stated that the furrow is the vulva (*yoni*) of the earth and the seed sown therein is the sperm. The verb *\*uḷu*, which goes back to Proto-Dravidian (which, in my opinion, was spoken in the Indus Civilization), is used in many Dravidian languages for ploughing as well as pigs' digging up of soil<sup>128</sup>. The idea that the earth sank into water and was then "brought up" by the boar, being in this process "violated" and "fertilized" during the menstruation period of the goddess, appears to reflect the "disappearance" of soil during the rainy season—which is the peak breeding time of the wild boar<sup>129</sup>—and its subsequent "surfacing" (and being ploughed) when the waters recede.

According to the Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa, the earth was lifted up by her husband, Prajāpati, in the form of a boar. By virtue of his name, King Janaka is associated with this creator god. Ploughing the earth, Janaka symbolically unites with the earth or the furrow he creates (which is then identified with his daughter)<sup>130</sup>. According to Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa 3,33, Prajāpati united with his own daughter and thereby gave birth to all beings; he was then killed by the terrible god Rudra in punishment for his sin of incest. In connection with the construction of the Vedic fire altar, it is said that Prajāpati (who is

equated with the year) became so exhausted from creating the world that he fell apart; by building the fire altar, he is put together again. Prajāpati is the "Primeval Man or Male" (*puruṣa*), sacrificed by the gods in the beginning so that the cosmos could be created out of his body parts<sup>131</sup>. In the Kālikāpurāṇa, Viṣṇu in his boar incarnation is killed by Śiva because his body had become impure through union with a menstruating woman: this is the reason (not mentioned in other sources) for his appearance as the *yajña-varāha* 'sacrificial boar', whose body parts were assumed as the various sacrifices and their implements (e.g., his three destructive boar sons became the three sacrificial fires)<sup>132</sup>.

The son of the goddess Earth by Viṣṇu's boar incarnation is named Naraka, a word which otherwise denotes 'hell' or 'infernal region'. It is etymologically related to Greek *nérthe* 'below' and *nérteroi* (= Latin *inferi*) 'those below, the dead'<sup>133</sup>. Naraka is a chthonic deity of vegetation associated with the spirits of the dead<sup>134</sup> and manure<sup>135</sup>:

"The divine power or being going by the name of Naraka is mainly a representative of dung, 'der Genius des Misthaufens', 'the demon of filth or manure', 'the god of the filth of the farm-yard'. As such he is also a 'Genius der Trieb- und Zeugungskraft der Erde'. Filth and manure, the favourite home of hogs and their relatives, actually are a product of the earth and the rooting and messing activities of these animals: no wonder that Naraka should have been a son of the goddess Earth and a god in the form of a boar" (Gonda 1954: 141).

The prolific offspring of the pig makes it a paragon of fertility, and the Kālikāpurāṇa stresses that sexual union with the sow-shaped earth could not satisfy the passion of the primeval boar. These swine parents and their sons wallowed in mud and filth in their 'dirt play' (*kardamakriḍā*,

*kardamalilā*)<sup>136</sup>. Bones of the wild pig (*Sus scrofa*), which is nowadays distributed throughout the Indus Valley<sup>137</sup>, have been found in a number of Harappan sites (Meadow 1991: 55)<sup>138</sup>. This animal is not represented in the iconography, however, probably because of its ominous connection with the dead and the dirt (as is also the case of the wild ass)<sup>139</sup>.

### ***The 'unicorn' elephant: ekadanta Gaṇapati***

Naraka's association with dirt connects him with the elephant-headed god Gaṇapati, another one-tusker, whom the goddess Pārvatī fashioned out of her own bodily dirt (*mala*)<sup>140</sup>. More specifically, *mala* denotes menstrual blood (e.g., a menstruating woman is *malinī*- 'impure'). In this context, the Goddess' bodily dirt is also called *rajas* (i.e., 'dust', as well as 'menstrual discharge'). Gaṇeśa's origin from menstrual blood parallels Naraka's origin from the primeval boar's intercourse with the menstruating goddess. It also seems to be the reason why Gaṇeśa is connected with the red planet Mars, why he wears a red garment, and why he is smeared with red paste<sup>141</sup>. On the other hand, the goddess' dirt out of which she fashioned her son also seems to refer to her excreta; Gaṇeśa is also worshipped in the form of images made of cow dung<sup>142</sup>. In this case, the goddess is found in the shape of a cow, an important mother symbol. The Tamils worship Piḷḷaiyār 'son, child' (Gaṇeśa) in the shape of cow dung balls, which are set on fire to cook a pot of milk during the cow-festival (*māṭṭu-p-poṅkal*) at the new year<sup>143</sup>. This South Indian festival is related to two northern Indian festivals that also involve fire and cattle, namely Holī and Divālī. The latter of these two includes the *narakacaturdaśī*, the last day of the dark half of the month connected with the killing of the demon Naraka. On the following new moon day, models of mountains and cattle are made of cow dung<sup>144</sup>. The Tamil festival undoubtedly goes back to the pastoralist Southern Neolithic culture (c. 2500-1500 BCE), the ash mounds of which were

excavated by Raymond Allchin<sup>145</sup>, and which seems to be derived from the Early Harappan cultures<sup>146</sup>.

The name Gaṇapati or Gaṇeśa 'host leader' and his retinue of the 'mother' goddesses are features suggesting that he is a double (probably the lunar double)<sup>147</sup> of Śiva's other son, Skanda (who is firmly associated with the morning or vernal sun); this god is the divine Senāpati 'army leader', accompanied by the 'mothers' associated with the Pleiades, his birth star. Both gods go back to the earlier class of Vināyakas, evil spirits who lead hosts of ghosts, and to the 'terrible' Vedic god Rudra, the lord of robber bands and spirits of the dead<sup>148</sup>. The Rīgveda (1,114,5) speaks of Rudra as the "ruddy boar of the sky" (*divo varāham aruṣam*), which is likely to refer to the red rising sun<sup>149</sup>, the planet Mars, or lightning<sup>150</sup>. On the other hand, Skanda is the overlord of the planet Mars<sup>151</sup>, who is said to be the son of the earth<sup>152</sup> like 'terrible' Naraka, the son of the earth and the primeval boar: this detail of planetary mythology is clarified by the 'terrible' Naraka's association with Rudra-Skanda-Gaṇapati<sup>153</sup>.

The elephant-headed Hindu god Gaṇapati (alias Gaṇeśa) is described as having just one tusk, two tusks or four tusks<sup>154</sup>. The one-tusked variety (Figure 19) is called *eka-danta-* or *eka-damṣṭra-* 'one-toothed'. Iconographic manuals such as the Śrītattvanidhi prescribe that Ekadanta-Gaṇapati should have a dark body and a large and clearly visible tusk in his right hand<sup>155</sup>. There are many different myths explaining why Gaṇapati is one-tusked<sup>156</sup>. One popular myth connects it with the moon (whose crescent resembles the broken tusk):

Gaṇeśa had overeaten balls of sweets (*modaka*, *laḍḍu*) of which he is very fond. His belly became quite round and eventually burst when Gaṇeśa fell off his rat-mount as this became frightened at the sight of a snake. The undigested balls fell on the ground, and the

moon, seeing this, burst into laughter. His laughter hurt Gaṇeśa, who pulled out one of his tusks and threw it at the moon. It caused a total eclipse and darkness. Eventually Gaṇeśa relented so that the moon only suffers from waxing and waning<sup>157</sup>.

The single tusk of Gaṇapati is also a male symbol. According to a 'fine saying' (*subhāṣita*) found in many works, Gaṇeśa as an androgyne has a tusk only on his male (right) side, the female (left) side being without a tusk:

"May the single-tusked Gaṇeśa guard the universe, who imitates his parents' custom in that his bride, it seems, has been allowed to take that half of him wherein his face is tuskless."<sup>158</sup>

The verse refers to the androgynous form of Śiva



**Figure 19** One-tusked Gaṇeśa holding his missing tusk in one of his four hands. Miniature of the Nurpur school dating from c. 1810 in the Museum of Chandigarh (after Martin-Dubost 1997: 64 Figure 29)

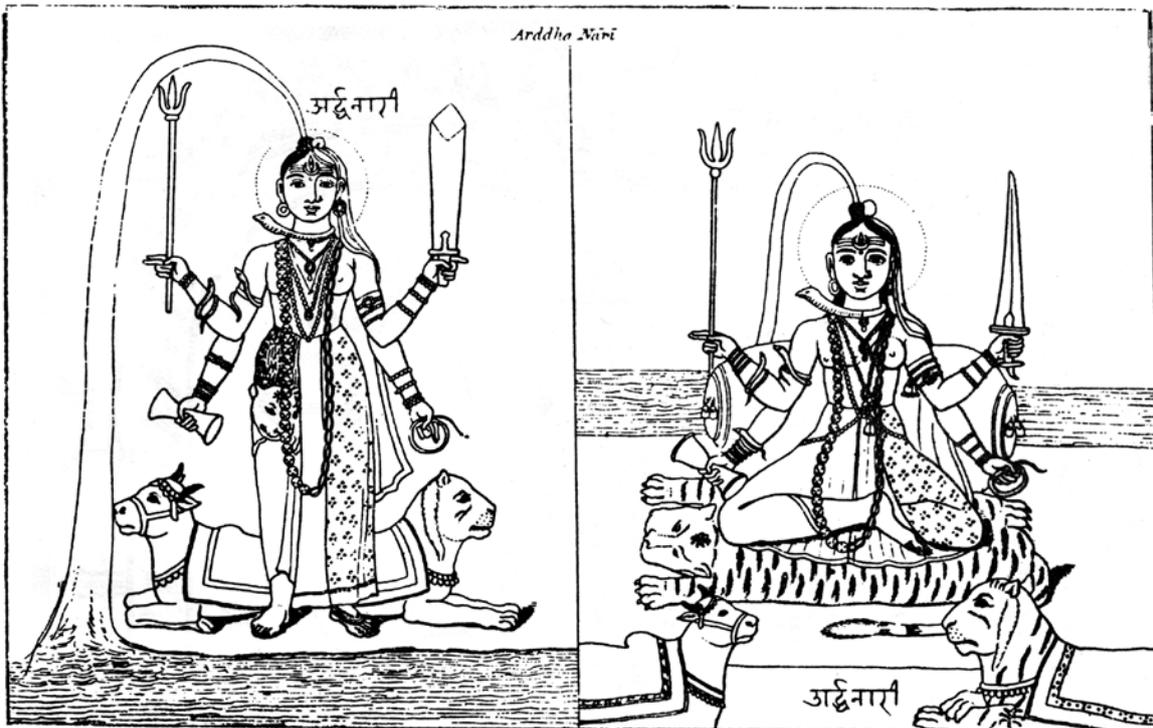


Figure 20 Śiva and the Goddess as an androgynous deity (after Moor 1810: Plate 24, 1 and 2)

as Ardhanārīśvara. Significantly, illustrations of this manifestation of the great god of Hinduism and his consort include also their symbolic animals, which, like those of the principal divine couples of ancient Western Asia (see section 10), are the bull (male) and the lion or tiger (female) (Figure 20).

The word *ekadanta*- 'single-tusked' is used in Sanskrit also for the plough. With its large male organ, the elephant is one of the male prototypes in the erotic sciences; the god Gaṇapati has erotic manifestations, too.

The dark colour of the elephant's body and its trumpeting have made it a favourite symbol for rain clouds. A very popular iconographic motif is Gaja-Lakṣmī, the Goddess of Wealth (Earth), sprinkled with water by two overarching elephants (Figure 21).

## 9. The Harappan 'unicorn' as the auroch (urus) or taurine bull

The Harappan unicorn bull does not have a hump (like that of the Indian zebu bull), leading Cunningham to conclude that the very first known Indus seal was a foreign import<sup>159</sup>.

Zoologists have established that modern humped zebu cattle (*Bos indicus*) are descendants of the wild *Bos namadicus* (short for *Bos primigenius namadicus*), known from Indian Pleistocene fossils. Modern humpless taurine cattle (*Bos taurus*) have been linked to the extinct wild *Bos primigenius* (short for *Bos primigenius primigenius*)—called aurochs or urus—that lived in Europe (until 1627 CE), North Africa, and Western Asia (Figure 22). Mitochondrial DNA and nuclear microsatellites have moreover indicated a pre-domestication divergence of about 200,000 years between *Bos namadicus* and *Bos primigenius*, and separate radiations for them since domestication<sup>160</sup>.



**Figure 21** Gaja-Lakṣmī. Medallion of the stūpa at Bhārhut, second century BCE (after Sharma 1994: 29)

In bone finds from Mehrgarh in Pakistani Baluchistan, truly wild taxa constituted approximately 55% of the material around 6000 BCE, while by 5000 BCE the portion of protodomesticates was as much as 80%. During this period, the ratio of cattle rose from 38% to 65%, and simultaneously the size of the animals grew smaller. This is clear evidence of local domestication<sup>161</sup>.

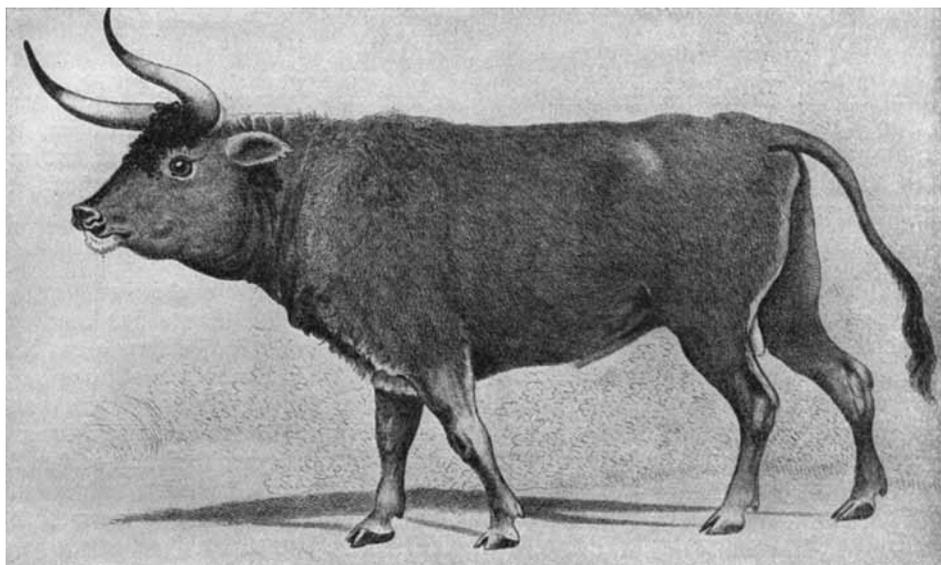
"The form of cattle present in the greater Indus region was presumably the zebu (*Bos indicus*). Representation of humped cattle dominate the coroplastic art of the region, while the distinctively cleft dorsal spines of thoracic vertebrae turn up occasionally in the faunal

collections together with zebu-like skull pieces. Also depicted on Indus seals, however, are non-humped cattle. Although it is not presently possible to determine from the available faunal material whether this latter form is represented or not, it was probably never particularly common in the area. In addition, there is now evidence that cattle could have been brought under human control locally and, once domesticated, were maintained at a size significantly above that of contemporary cattle in Europe and Anatolia."<sup>162</sup>

Recently analyzed genetic data of South Asian cattle indicate introgression between taurine and zebu cattle that could have begun by the third millennium BCE. Dorian Fuller concludes:

"Depictions on Harappan seals indicate that some humpless taurine cattle had spread into South Asia from the west by this time (Zeuner 1963). Thus, sometime between the period of zebu domestication in Pakistan and the urban Harappan civilization (from the mid Third Millennium BC), the introgression between West Asian and South Asian cattle had begun, a process that remains detectable in the genes of modern cattle populations (Kumar *et al.* 2003)."<sup>163</sup>

Although the domesticated humped zebu spread from Pakistan to the Iranian plateau<sup>164</sup> and even to Mesopotamia<sup>165</sup>, it is humpless taurine cattle that predominate in the ancient Near East. Genetic studies point towards the Neolithic Near East as the centre of origin for *Bos taurus*<sup>166</sup>. In glyptics of the ancient Near East, depicted cattle are regularly humpless, usually shown in profile so that only one horn is visible. This applies to scenes of both domesticated cattle (Figures 23-24) and wild cattle (Figure 25). Even after the domestication of cattle,



**Figure 22** The aurochs or urus (*Bos primigenius primigenius*) in a 19th century copy of a 16th century European painting (after *Brehms Thierleben* (1927 ed.), from Wikipedia commons)

wild cattle (*Bos primigenius*) could still be found throughout the Near East:

"They still roamed the plains of north-western Mesopotamia as late as Neo-Assyrian times, when they were hunted by Assyrian kings. The wild bull must have been a truly awe-inspiring beast, six feet tall at the shoulder and with an enormous pair of wide-sweeping horns. Domestic cattle were tiny by comparison. As a visual and literary image of power and strength, wild cattle preoccupied the Mesopotamian imagination, a metaphor for deity or a suitable comparison for heroes or kings."<sup>167</sup>

Eminent archaeozoologists thus identify the Indus 'unicorn' as a type of humpless cattle. Its Near Eastern origin coincides with the artistic convention of showing them in profile with one horn visible, a fashion which is likewise of Mesopotamian origin. This interpretation of the Indus 'unicorn' has been held and continues to be held by a number of scholars<sup>168</sup>.

Harappan sailors may have imported aurochs or taurine cattle in very small numbers—too few to

survive for long—from Mesopotamia to the Indus Valley<sup>169</sup>. It is also possible that visiting Harappan craftsmen borrowed just the 'unicorn' motif at the same time (in the Late Early Dynastic period or Early Akkadian period) as other Near Eastern motifs (e.g., the 'contest', the 'double-bun hair style' of warrior kings, the victory pose of placing the foot upon the defeated)<sup>170</sup>.

Some taurine cattle could also have made it overland to the Indus Valley by the time of the Indus Civilization, and in greater numbers a little later. The "Bactria and Margiana Archaeological Complex" (BMAC) alias "Oxus Civilization", dated c. 2400-1500 BCE<sup>171</sup>, had humpless domestic cattle used for ploughing (Figure 26); golden images of such bulls (Figure 27) were found in the Quetta treasure left behind by BMAC people who came to the Indus Valley around the 20th century BCE<sup>172</sup>. These BMAC immigrants were probably a vanguard of Aryan-speaking pastoralists coming with taurine cattle from the Eurasian steppes to Iran and India via Central Asia; they appear en route to have taken over the rule of the BMAC<sup>173</sup>.



**Figure 23** Humpless taurine cattle and wheat on a Sumerian cylinder seal of c. 3000 BCE in the Louvre Museum (after Parrot 1960: 88 no. 108)



**Figure 24** Domestic taurine cattle in the sacred precincts, Sumerian cylinder seal from c. 3000 BCE in the Baghdad Museum (after Parrot 1960: 89 no. 113)



**Figure 25** Sumerian king hunts wild bulls. Cylinder seal c. 3200 BCE (after Amiet 1980: no. 1614)



**Figure 26** Feasting and ploughing on a BMAC silver vase, early 2nd millennium BCE (after Ligabue and Salvatori 1989: 136, Figure 9)



**Figure 27** Bull-shaped golden pendants from the BMAC treasure found at Quetta, Pakistan (after *Les cités oubliées* 1988: 124 nos. 153-154)

## 10. The lion-bull combat and the 'sacred marriage' in Western Asia

Mark Kenoyer (2009) presents an argument against the Mesopotamian origin of the unicorn, citing the regular combination of the unicorn bull with the lion in Western Asiatic art (cf. Figures 6, 28, 29). He points out that the Indus 'unicorn' is not associated with the lion and, furthermore, that the lion in fact is nowhere to be seen in Harappan art. Kenoyer is right about the close association between the unicorn bull and the lion in Western Asiatic art, but it actually supports (rather than detracts from) a Mesopotamian derivation of the unicorn bull. To back up this statement, it is necessary to discuss at some length the lion and bull motif, as it is fundamentally important for an understanding of the symbolism of the bull and its horns, and the unicorn in general<sup>174</sup>.

In the Mesopotamian art of the Late Uruk period (c. 3400-3100 BCE), the king is represented as hunting lions (Figure 28) and wild bulls (Figure 25). The king is also shown holding back a rearing lion on either side with his bare hands (Figure 29). These scenes depict the king as a match for—or even more powerful than—the mightiest of beasts. In the Uruk-inspired art of Predynastic Egypt (c. 3200-3000 BCE), the king of Upper Egypt is depicted as a giant lion as well as a giant wild bull when defeating his human enemies. In Proto-Elamite art (c. 3100-2700 BCE), the fashion of representing humans in animal shape is generally extended from kings to all other people. One can expect that in royal hunting scenes, therefore, the lion and the bull as royal animals would come to be adversaries with one another. The combat between the lion and the bull is a much repeated theme in Western Asiatic art in general, but it does not merely repeat the natural enmity between these mighty animals in nature. On one Proto-Elamite seal (Figure 30)<sup>175</sup>, an

enormous bull masters two small lions and a giant lion dominates two small bulls. The lion and the bull are personifications of opposite cosmic forces, whose symmetrically balanced victories and defeats symbolize the equilibrium that manifests itself in the cycle of seasons or the alternation of night and day<sup>176</sup>.

On another Proto-Elamite seal with two antithetic scenes, a standing lion shoots a squatting bull and a standing bull clubs a squatting lion (Figure 31). With its yellowish colour and mane of ray-like hair, the lion is a good symbol for the sun<sup>177</sup> and, accordingly, the day. The bull, with its darker skin and horns resembling the sickle moon, symbolizes night. Standing up and sitting down can refer to sunrise and sunset, or the appearance and disappearance of the moon and the stars: it is at these moments of dawn and dusk that day takes over the night and vice versa. The lion and the bull can represent various opposing but complementary forces of nature, such as, day and night :: light and darkness :: life and death :: summer and winter :: heat and cold :: fire and water. The corresponding members of these oppositions can be homologized (bull = moon = night = darkness = death = winter = cold = water; lion = sun = day = light = life = summer = heat = fire) with everything reduced to a basic dualism that is characteristic of Iranian religion in later times as well.

### *Lion and bull as symbols of female earth and male sky*

On the first of the above-mentioned Proto-Elamite seals with antithetic combats between lion and bull (Figure 30), as well as on several other Proto-Elamite seals where the lion in an Atlas-like pose holds up mountains and trees (Figure 32), one finds next to the lion a pictogram that replicates the Archaic Sumerian script sign for the word KI 'earth'<sup>178</sup>. In these representations (and Proto-Elamite art in general), the lion is often female; in this regard,



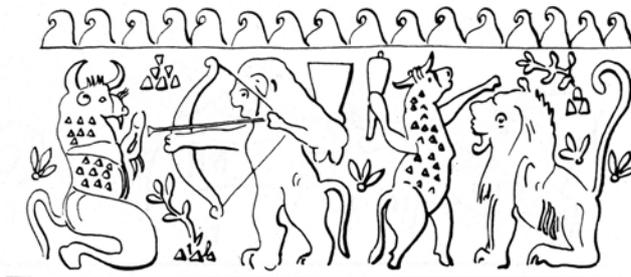
**Figure 28** Sumerian king hunts lions. Stela from Uruk, c. 3200 BCE (after Aruz (ed.) 2003: 22, Figure 5)



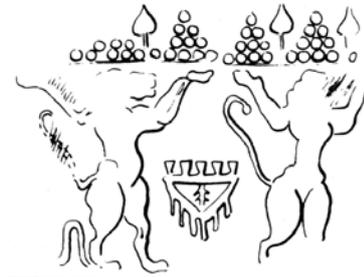
**Figure 29** Sumerian king holds back two lions. Handle of the flint knife from Jebel el-Araq, Upper Egypt (after Parrot 1960: 80 no. 99)



**Figure 30** Lion—bull contest on a Proto-Elamite seal from Susa, c. 3000 BCE (after Amiet 1980: no. 585)



**Figure 31** Lion and bull in combat with each other. Proto-Elamite seal, c. 3000 BCE (after Amiet 1980: no. 591)



**Figure 32** Goddess Earth as lioness holding up mountains. Proto-Elamite seal, c. 3000 BCE. (after Amiet 1980: no. 577)

the lion represents the earth conceptualized as a goddess. The depiction of mountains in this context is natural, since in nature mountains are often the lion's habitat. This interpretation agrees with the cuneiform tradition: "Ki is the Sumerian word for earth, and was sometimes personified as a goddess and female counterpart to An (heaven). In some Sumerian accounts, An copulates with Ki to produce a variety of plants."<sup>179</sup> That the bull in the lion-bull combat represents the sky is in agreement with the early Mesopotamian concept of the "Bull

of Heaven"<sup>180</sup> discussed below. The thundering and raining sky-god is many archaic religions conceived to be a roaring bull, whose semen fertilizes the earth<sup>181</sup>.

#### ***Anatolian cult of the lion-escorted goddess and her slain bull-husband in Anatolia***

Representing the earliest Neolithic cultures in which agriculture and animal husbandry began in Western Asia are the sites of Çatal Hüyük and Hacilar in Anatolia. Here impressive shrines datable to c. 7000

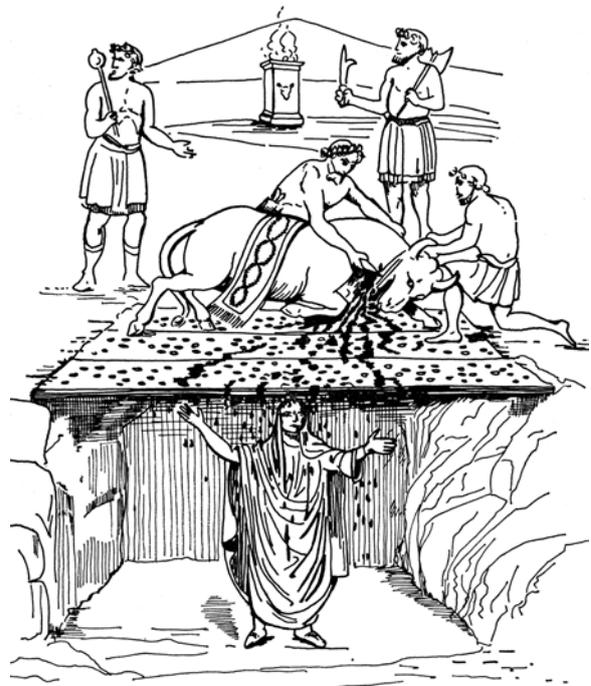
BCE attest to the cult of the great earth goddess who had the lion as her symbolic animal (Figure 33) and to whom bulls were sacrificed. More than 5000 years later, this Anatolian goddess was known to the Hittites as Kubaba and still later to the Greeks and Romans as Kybele. In the first millennium BCE, she was worshipped with an orgiastic cult in which her priests were castrated like Attis, the young lover of the goddess in the myth. An important part of Kybele's mystic cult was the taurobolium (Figure 34), which involved sacrifice of a bull whose blood was poured on the worshipper to cleanse him or her of sins and whose testicles were eaten in a sacramental meal. This "mother of the gods" had also a martial aspect: her lions guarded the city gates, while walls built on high mounds surrounding the city formed the mural crown on the head of this earth goddess. As long as she stood for the defense, the city walls remained impregnable<sup>182</sup>.



**Figure 33** Mother Earth seated on a lion throne and giving birth. Çatal Hüyük, Turkey, c. 7000 BCE  
(after Vermaseren 1977: Plate 5)

### *The lion-escorted goddess and her bull-husband in Syrian religion*

The religion of ancient Syria<sup>183</sup> gives further background that is useful for understanding the Mesopotamian religion, with which the Harappans primarily had contact. According to Lucian, who wrote an account "Of the Syrian Goddess" in c. 150 CE, the chief goddess of many Syrian towns was Atargatis. Her throne in the temple was buttressed by lions, while the throne of her husband Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al-Hadad was supported by bulls. Like the earlier Canaanite goddess ʿAθtart (Astarte) and ʿAnat, the chief goddess of Ugarit (Ras Shamra) in the 14th century BCE, Atargatis symbolized nature's power of reproduction and her cult culminated in her sacred marriage. Hadad was the god of thunder and rain; his other name, Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al, means 'husband, owner' (the husband who had paid the bride-price owned his wife). He owned the cultivated land and was called "the husband of furrow".



**Figure 34** Taurobolium  
(after Vermaseren 1977: Figure 30)

In Ugarit, the year had three seasons, ruled by three gods in turn. The thunder god Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al ruled the season of inseminating rains, fresh vegetation and growth. When it was his time to abdicate, Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al descended to the netherworld. After a short interregnum by <sup>ʿ</sup>Aθtar, shown sitting like a small boy on Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al's throne, there followed the rule of Mot, the god of the drying wind and drought (which makes everything fade and die, but also ripens the corn and yields full harvest). Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al's sister-beloved, the "virgin <sup>ʿ</sup>Anat", would try to rescue Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al. The cycle closed with her furiously attacking Mot, cutting his head like ripe corn, so that Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al might return and ascend his throne to the joyous shouts of the gods. This moment coincides with the new year festival and the sacred marriage of Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al and <sup>ʿ</sup>Anat'. <sup>ʿ</sup>Anat's title of 'virgin' expresses her ability to renew her virginity for a new sacred marriage. In one myth, Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al as a bull mates with <sup>ʿ</sup>Anat in the shape of a cow. After the death of Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al, <sup>ʿ</sup>Anat would give birth to a male calf, the young Ba<sup>ʿ</sup>al, with whom she apparently was expected to unite in a sacred marriage the next year.

### ***The Mesopotamian counterpart of the Anatolian goddess and her sacred marriage***

In Mesopotamian religion, the Anatolian goddess had a counterpart in the Sumerian Inanna and Akkadian Ištar (earlier Eštar), related to Syrian goddess Astarte and to <sup>ʿ</sup>Aθtar, the male god of war and the planet Venus in Pre-Islamic South Arabia. The most important Mesopotamian goddess of all times, Inanna-Ištar was the goddess of sexual love and prostitutes, as well as a bloodthirsty warrior deity who was fond of battle and stood by her favourite kings in battle. Her totem was the lion and her astral manifestation was the planet Venus<sup>184</sup>. At least one local variant of Ištar, the goddess of Mari in Syria, was called 'Mistress of the city wall' (*bêlêt hišâri*)<sup>185</sup>.

The mystic cult of this goddess also included a

'sacred marriage', in which the Sumerian king was ritually married to the goddess Inanna (the king being identified with the goddess's young lover and husband, Dumuzi). Described as a shepherd (and in one cult song as a warrior hero), Dumuzi was a god of the pastoralists. When Inanna visited the underworld, she could not return without a substitute to take her place. Therefore, demons came to fetch Inanna's beloved young husband to replace her. Thus Dumuzi died and became a god of the underworld. Ritual lamentation for the death of Dumuzi was part of the cult<sup>186</sup>. The fertility of vegetation, animals and humans was believed to depend upon the union of Inanna and Dumuzi<sup>187</sup>. The union was enacted by priestly personnel, and then in later times with cult statues of the gods. People in general took part in the festival that included processions, dance, music and banquets. The sacred marriage was celebrated at least on the new year's day, but could be performed also monthly on the "day of the disappearance of the moon". "It is commonly thought that, as Dumuzi's mythological half-year imprisonment in the Netherworld ended around the New Year, his ascent probably included a sacred marriage with his spouse Inanna."<sup>188</sup> The Sumerian king was equated with "Inanna's *mes-tree*", a cosmic tree that "unites heaven and earth". In later Assyrian royal ideology and Jewish mysticism, the tree symbolizes the main god of the pantheon as Perfect Man, who combines the powers of all the great gods and righteously distributes divine blessings on earth<sup>189</sup>.

## **11. The lion-bull combat and the 'sacred marriage' in ancient South Asia**

### ***Transfer of the cult of the lion-escorted goddess to Afghanistan and India***

The classical Mesopotamian goddess Inanna-Ištar represents a syncretization of many local deities

of her description, one of these being Nanaya<sup>190</sup>. Around 2000 BCE, Nanaya's cult spread via Elam to Afghanistan<sup>191</sup>, where she is depicted in Mesopotamian dress and flanked with lions on the compartmented metal seals of the BMAC culture (Figure 35). The cult of Nanaya or Nana was adopted by the Iranian-speaking tribes of Kuṣāṇas upon their arrival in Afghanistan around the beginning of the Christian era; the goddess is then represented as seated on a lion and wearing a mural crown (Figure 36). Nana is still worshipped in some places in Afghanistan as "Bibi Nani"<sup>192</sup>.

When the Kuṣāṇas conquered northwestern India, their cult of the lion-escorted goddess is first attested there in Kuṣāṇa sculptures of the Mahiṣasuramardini, 'Crusher of the buffalo demon'. This is the standard epithet of Durgā, whose myths surface in texts from the 5th century CE onwards. Her main feat is depicted in the magnificent Pallava granite panel at Māmallapuram (c. 700 CE), which greatly resembles the above-discussed Proto-Elamite sealing: the lion-riding goddess Durgā uses bow and arrows on her opponent, the buffalo demon Mahiṣa Asura who has the club as his weapon (Figure 37).



**Figure 35** Lion-escorted Goddess on a golden BMAC seal from Afghanistan  
(after Ligabue and Salvatori 1989: 202, Plate 58)

The Buffalo demon is described as a great warrior, who on the point of being defeated changes his shape into various mighty animals, ending with that of a human warrior. In some variants of the myth the demon is hopelessly in love with the goddess, reaching union with her (touching her female organ) only at the moment of death<sup>193</sup>.

Durgā's main festival is the navarātri festival culminating on the "tenth day of victory". This is around the autumnal equinox, when the rains end [i.e., the thundering Heavenly Bull dies!], the roads become passable, and war expeditions traditionally began. In earlier times, another navarātri was celebrated six months later at the vernal equinox (the new year). The orgiastic navarātri festival includes feasting with strong drinks and the meat of the various animals sacrificed to the goddess, especially the water buffalo; in olden times, human victims were decapitated. One must behave like a *śabara* ('savage') on the final day:

"People should be engaged in amorous play with single women, young girls, courtesans and dancers, amidst the sound of horns and



**Figure 36** Goddess Nana from Kuṣāṇa period Afghanistan (after Azarpay 1976: Figure 6)



Figure 37 Lion-riding Goddess Durgā defeating the buffalo demon. Rock-panel, Mamallapuram, South India, c. 700 CE  
(after Kramrisch 1954: Plate 86)

instruments, and with drums and kettle-drums, with flags and various sorts of cloths covered with a miscellany of parched grain and flowers; by throwing dust and mud; with auspicious ceremonies for fun; by mentioning the female and male organs, with songs on the male and female organs, with words for the female and male organs, until they have enough of it. If one is not derided by others, if one does not deride others, the Goddess will be angry and utter a very terrible curse."<sup>194</sup>

In Nepal, this festival is celebrated in a fortress. Many names of this martial goddess, starting with Durgā, are directly related to words denoting 'fortress'<sup>195</sup>. In South Indian villages, the yearly marriage of the guardian goddess involves the sacrifice of a water buffalo representing her husband. In the associated myths, the high caste

bride discovers that the groom has deceived her by concealing his lowly birth and kills him; the husband is converted into a tree<sup>196</sup>.

#### *Durgā's predecessors in the Veda*

A predecessor of Durgā had come to India already much earlier. In the Vedic texts, her manifestation is Goddess Vāc, who secures victory and is addressed as *simhī* 'lioness', *mahiṣī* 'she-buffalo', and *aṣādhā* 'invincible'. Several archaic rituals connected with her cult are described. One is on the *mahāvratā* day (either a solstice or equinox). A man of high birth and a man of low birth fight for a bull hide that represents the sun, and the former wins. A chariot warrior shoots three arrows at the hide of a sterile cow. All sorts of musical instruments representing the goddess are played, especially a thundering 'earth drum' which is covered with a bull's hide.

and beaten with its tail. (The words "beat" and "tail" have a sexual as well as violent connotation) A priestly ascetic who has practiced celibacy and a prostitute unite sexually and scold each other for misbehaviour<sup>197</sup>. The *vrātyastoma* rituals performed before and after raiding expeditions closely resemble the later *navarātris*. Particularly important is the horse sacrifice (*aśvamedha*). The chief victim, a stallion, is "escorted" by an army on a year-long war expedition; its celibacy ends in a 'sacred marriage' with the chief queen of the sacrificing king. The bridegroom of this 'marriage', who is killed, was supposed to have fertilized the queen and the earth. The queen's title, *mahiṣī* 'she-buffalo', connects her with the goddess Vāc; this suggests that the sacrificed male victim representing her husband was *mahiṣa* 'water buffalo bull' before it was transformed into a horse, the most important animal for the Vedic Aryans. The carver of the horse, a virginal youth, was garlanded; he was lamented, as if he was to die, for in former times he himself was cut up, probably as the chief victim of the obsolete human sacrifice (*puruṣamedha*), where the victim represented the Primeval Man (*puruṣa*) out of whose severed limbs the world came into being<sup>198</sup>. — Evidence for the practice of similar 'sacred marriage' in Harappan religion is a seal from Chanhu-daro depicting a sexual intercourse between a bison and a prostrate woman with an elaborate headdress and outspread legs (Figure 38)<sup>199</sup>.

The Dāsas, who were enemies of the Rigvedic Aryans, had 'autumnal' fortresses (*śārādī pur*), which were probably venues of the autumnal festival of the Goddess, like the present-day fortress called Śār(a)dī in Kashmir. The Dāsa chief Śambara shares the same name as the fierce form of the god Śiva in Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism; this name evokes the *śabara* 'savage' figuring in the autumnal *navarātri*<sup>200</sup>.

### ***The Harappan goddess of war***

The Harappans had a goddess of war connected with

the tiger, another large feline that was once native to the Indus Valley. On a cylinder seal from Kalibangan (Figure 39), a goddess in long skirt and plaited hair holds the hands of two warriors in the process of spearing each other. Next to this scene, the same deity is shown with an elaborate horn crown and the back part of a tiger as a continuation of her body. The hair of the two warriors is arranged into the 'double bun' or chignon at the back of the head, characteristic of Late Early Dynastic Mesopotamian kings on the warpath. As in the later South Asian tradition, this tiger-riding goddess of war apparently received water buffaloes in sacrifice. There are several Harappan images of a man who spears a water buffalo while placing one of his feet on the head of the beast. This pose came to signify 'victory' in Mesopotamian glyptic art during the reign of Sargon the Great (2334-2279 BCE)<sup>201</sup>.

### ***The aurochs and lion in Western Asia = the wild water buffalo and tiger in South Asia***

In India, the wild water buffalo is the most dangerous animal besides the tiger. There is



**Figure 38** Intercourse of bison and priestess on an Indus seal from Chanhu-daro. (Cf. Figure 44!)  
(after Mackay 1943: Plate 51, 13)



Figure 39 Warriors spearing each other and tiger-goddess on a cylinder seal from Kalibangan, K-65 (after CISI 1: 311)

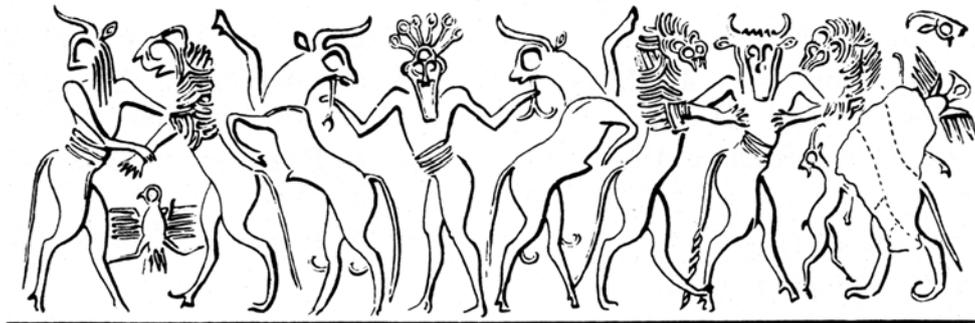


Figure 40 Contest with bulls and lions, Fara period cylinder seal, c. 2500 BCE (after Amiet 1980: no. 893)

direct glyptic confirmation that these two natural enemies actually form the Indian counterpart to the aurochs and lion, the main characters of the 'contest' motif on Western Asiatic glyptics. In the Late Early Dynastic period, the fight between the lion and the bull on Proto-Elamite seals developed into the 'Gilgamesh and Enkidu'<sup>202</sup> type of contest, which was the most important motif of the royal seals in the Akkadian period (Figure 40). During the sixty year long rule of Sargon the Great, the aurochs bull is suddenly replaced with the water buffalo in this 'contest' scene (Figure 41). Sargon boasts that ships from the far-off land of Meluhha (nowadays fairly unanimously considered to denote the Greater Indus Valley) came to his new capital Akkad. These ships probably brought some water buffaloes as gifts to Sargon's royal park. Before this time, the water buffalo is not attested in the Mesopotamian fauna (with neither bone finds, nor pictorial representations). On the other hand, in

the Harappan version of the 'contest' motif (Figure 42), the hero holds back two tigers (instead of lions) the Mesopotamian origin of which is clear from the hairstyle of the Harappan hero (either 'six locks of hair' or the 'chignon'). The establishment of this correspondence (aurochs and lion = water buffalo and tiger) makes it impossible to cite the absence of lion in Harappan art as an argument against the Western Asiatic origin of the unicorn motif.

## 12. The Bull of Heaven and astral symbols and myths

In Mesopotamia, the 'Bull of Heaven' (Sumerian  $GU_4$ -AN-NA = Akkadian *ālu*) is mentioned both in the Sumerian poem "Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven" and in tablet VI of the Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic. After Gilgamesh (the King of Uruk) rejects the marriage proposal and sexual



Figure 41 Contest with water buffalo and lion, Akkadian seal, c. 2300 BCE (after Aruz (ed.) 2003: 218 no. 146)

advances of Ishtar (the guardian goddess of the city), citing the fate of her other lovers who have lost their lives in such a marriage, the spurned goddess asks her father (the Sky god An) to send his demonic bull to destroy the city of Uruk. The bull causes much destruction, but is eventually killed by Gilgamesh with the assistance of his friend Enkidu<sup>203</sup>.

In Mesopotamia, the lion and bull myth was transferred to the sky: the zodiacal constellation Taurus was also called 'Bull of Heaven' (Sumerian <sup>mul</sup>GU<sub>4</sub>-AN-NA)<sup>204</sup>. Dating to 4000 BCE is an astral myth that apparently involves the killing of the bull by the lion: when the zodiacal sign of Lion (Sumerian <sup>mul</sup>UR.GU.LA 'lion') with its "royal star" (*šarru* = Regulus = alpha Leonis) stood at the zenith (thereby displaying its maximum power), the Bull (comprising "the Bull's eye" = Aldebaran = alpha Tauri and the Pleiades with Alcyone = ēta Tauri) set heliacally under the western horizon; remaining invisible for a period of forty days, it was then "reborn", rising again heliacally at the spring equinox<sup>205</sup>.

Apparently the rosette on the forehead of many Western Asiatic and related bull statuettes (Figure 43) represents the red star Aldebaran as the eye of the Heavenly Bull in the constellation Taurus. Such a "third eye" is depicted on the forehead of some

bull images of the Indus Civilization and the related Kulli culture. Later in South Asia, water buffalos with three eyes are depicted in wrathful tantric images of the god Śiva and other deities (Figure 44)<sup>206</sup>.

Sumerian sculptures of a reclining bull covered with inlaid trefoils and quatrefoils have plausibly been interpreted to represent the 'Bull of Heaven'<sup>207</sup>. Such statues are known both from the Jemdet Nasr period (c. 3100-2900 BCE) (Figure 45) and from the Neo-Sumerian time (c. 2100-1900 BCE) (Figure



Figure 42 Harappan version of the contest motif: hero with tigers on seal M-308 (after CISI 1: 384)



**Figure 43** Silver bull's head with a star-like rosette on its forehead. Queen Puabi's tomb chamber, Ur, c. 2400 BCE. Now in the University Museum, Philadelphia (after Aruz (ed.) 2003: 115 no. 65)



**Figure 44** God of Death as a water buffalo with three eyes, riding a buffalo that copulates with and tramples a prostrate human being. (Cf. Figure 38!) (after Grünwedel 1900: 168, Abb. 142)



**Figure 45a** An early Sumerian statuette of the Bull of Heaven, made of blue lapis lazuli, c. 3000 BCE (after *La Mésopotamie* 2000: no. 46)



**Figure 45b** An early Sumerian statuette of the Bull of Heaven from Uruk, c. 3000 BCE. Now in the Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin (after Aruz (ed.) 2003, 17 no. 2b)

46) (Parpola 1985: 26-29). A mosaic of a reclining bull covered with trefoils was found in the 'palace' of the BMAC site Dashly-3 in northern Afghanistan (Figure 47)<sup>208</sup>. From Mohenjo-daro comes a fragmentary steatite sculpture of an animal covered with red-coloured trefoils and figures-of-eight.

Though its head and feet are missing, the animal can be identified as a bull; the space on its underside with holes for attaching separate sexual organs is too narrow for udders, but sufficient for testicles and penis (Figure 48)<sup>209</sup>.

The hypothesis that the quatrefoils, trefoils,

figures-of-eight and dots-in-circle of these bull sculptures represent constellations is supported not only by such parallels as the trefoils covering the body of the cow-shaped Egyptian "Lady of Heaven" in Tutankhamon's tomb<sup>210</sup>. The trefoil motif corresponds to the Sumerian pictogram consisting of three stars placed in a triangle: this sign expresses the word MUL 'constellation'<sup>211</sup>; it is also the name of the Pleiades (<sup>mul</sup>MUL) as the constellation par excellence<sup>212</sup>. The dress of the famous 'Priest-king' statue from Mohenjo-daro—decorated with red-coloured trefoils, figures-of-eight and dots-in-circle (Figure 49)—has been compared to the festive clothes of Near Eastern gods and divine kings onto which were sewn golden stars, rosettes, and so forth and called 'sky-garments' (Sumerian AN.MA = Akkadian *nalbaš šamê*)<sup>213</sup>. In the 5th century CE, the Egyptian author Nonnos (writing in Greek) describes a temple of the Syrian city of Tyrus and calls its deity 'Starclad God' (Βῆλ ἄστροχίτων), "clad in a patterned robe like the sky, and image of the universe" and "called Starclad, since by night starry mantles illuminate the sky."<sup>214</sup>

Related Harappan traditions seem to have survived in India until Vedic times; at the royal consecration, the king was invested with a *tārpya* garment with images of sacrificial fireplaces (*dhiṣṇya*) sewn onto it. According to the Mahābhārata (3,43), stars are the fireplaces (*dhiṣṇya*) of pious ancient Sages in the sky. This is the same dress worn by the divine King Varuṇa, who is associated with the night sky<sup>215</sup>. In the royal horse sacrifice (and the parallel human sacrifice, obsolete in Vedic times), in his 'sacred marriage' with the king's chief queen, the male victim is enveloped in the *tārpya* garment<sup>216</sup>.

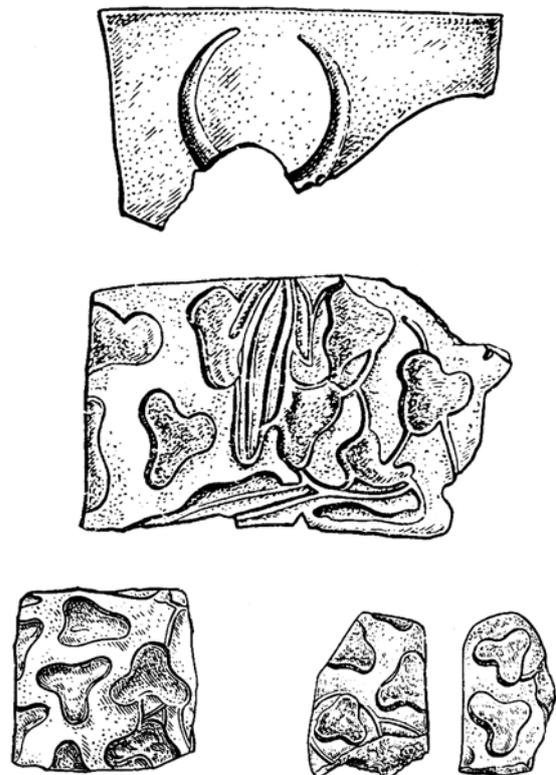
### ***Astral myth of the primeval incest and the killing of the male creator in Vedic India***

In the Vedic texts, there are several variants in which the creator god Prajāpati creates the goddess Vāc out of himself and then seeks to pair with this

daughter. She tries to escape his incestuous advances by assuming the female form of one animal species after another, while Prajāpati chases her by assuming the shape of the corresponding male. In this way, they create all of the different kinds of animals in the world. According to the Aitareya-Brahmana



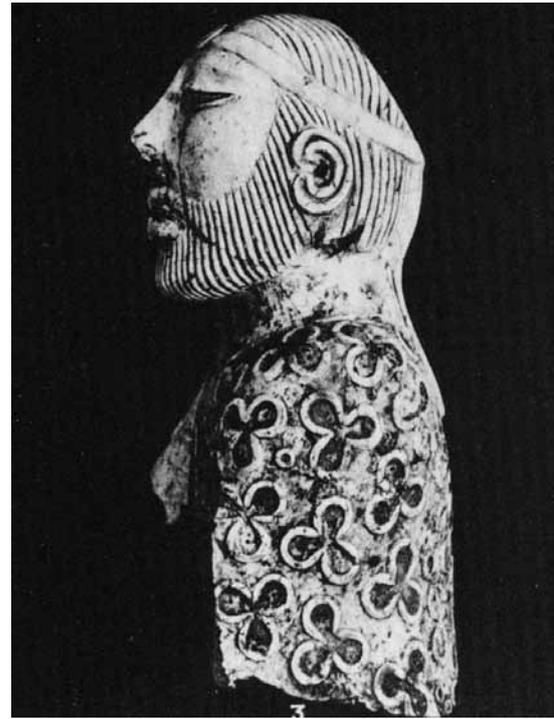
**Figure 46** A Neo-Sumerian statue of the Bull of Heaven from Tello, c. 2000 BCE, now in the Louvre, Paris (after Parrot 1960: 225 no. 276a)



**Figure 47** Mosaic of a reclining bull decorated with trefoils from the BMAC site Dashly-3 in northern Afghanistan, c. 2000 BCE (after Parpola 1985: Figure 21 (from Sarianidi 1977: Figure 19))



**Figure 48** Fragment of a Harappan bull statuette, decorated with trefoils and figures-of-eight (after Parpola 1985: 35)



**Figure 49** The 'Priest-King' statuette from Mohenjodaro (after Marshall (ed.) 1931: III, Plate 98,3)

(3,33), "Prajāpati conceived a passion for his own daughter... Having become an antelope stag [*ṛśya-*] he approached her in the form of a doe [*rohī-*]."<sup>217</sup> Wanting to punish Prajāpati for this sin of incest, the gods created the 'terrible' Rudra to pierce him with an arrow. The chapter identifies the various participants of this myth (the doe, the stag, the arrow and the hunter) with constellations of the Vedic star calendar, starting with Aldebaran<sup>218</sup> (called *rohiṇī* 'red' in Sanskrit; this word also denotes a virginal girl at the time of her first menstruation)<sup>219</sup>. In this version, Prajāpati is the antelope stag (*ṛśya-*), represented by the constellation named *mṛgaśīrṣa-*, 'antelope's head', situated in the Orion system. If this union with the *ṛśya-* initiated rains at the summer solstice (as does Ṛśyaśṛṅga's union in many versions of the legend; compare also the union of the celibate student and the prostitute at the mahāvratā), the heliacal rising of the *mṛgaśīrṣa-* at the summer solstice could mark this event astronomically, dating it to around 2000 BCE<sup>220</sup>.

### 13. Identification of the Harappan 'unicorn' as the nilgai antelope

While many archaeozoologists have identified the Indus unicorn as humpless cattle, this identification is not without its difficulties: "The presence of so much imagery of unhumped cattle in the Mature Harappa, in the absence of confirming osteological evidence, is one of the unresolved issues of the Indus Age."<sup>221</sup> Caroline Grigson, who wrote her Ph.D. on the skulls of the taurine and zebu cattle and their wild ancestors (1973), is one archaeozoologist who is not happy with the urus identification. Having studied the various distinguishing features of the Indus 'unicorn', she has found that in many respects the representations of the 'unicorn' do not accurately depict the *Bos primigenius*. But while other bovid species which could possibly have served as models (the Indian gaur, buffalo, black buck, nilgai, the Middle Eastern hartebeest and

oryx, and even the Tibetan antelope) "resemble the unicorn in some ways, they all differ from it even more than *Bos primigenius* does."<sup>222</sup> In Grigson's opinion, the most likely interpretation is that "while being based on *Bos primigenius* these seals have been copied again and again *in the absence of the original animal*. And in the process of being copied, either from a depiction of the actual animal or from a remembered animal, many of its features became distorted or perhaps replaced with those of other species."<sup>223</sup> Grigson concludes that "depictions of the unicorn, far from proving that *Bos primigenius* was living in the Indus Valley, are evidence that it was *not*. If it had been present, and therefore available as a living model, it would, like the humped ox, have been much more carefully and accurately depicted" (Grigson 1984: 168).

As Grigson notes, this possibility had in fact already been suggested by Ernest Mackay: "the one-horned beast, which is not far removed from an actual animal, might easily have assumed from constant copying the form we now see on the seals, the animal itself having become rare or extinct."<sup>224</sup> Mackay decided to "term it a 'urus bull'", but he qualified this with a reservation: "I do not think these animals are the ordinary ox. The head is much too small and pointed."<sup>225</sup>

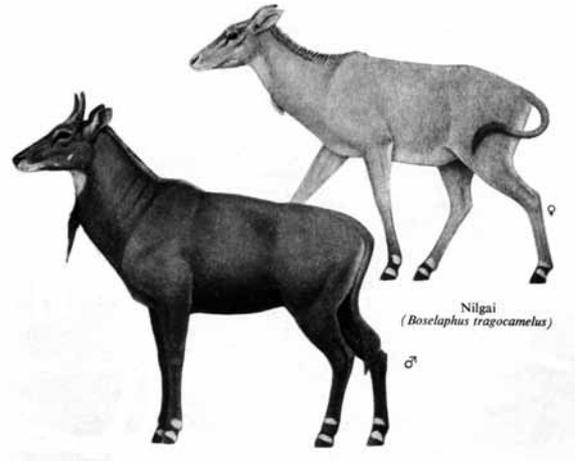
I accept the hypothesis that the 'unicorn' bull originally represented the *Bos primigenius* of Western Asia. Adopted from Mesopotamia by the Harappans, in the Indus Valley this imported image was largely remodeled after a local animal that occupied an important position in the Harappan religion. Its symbolism and function should have been at least partially similar to those of the wild bull in Mesopotamia, which represented the thundering "Bull of Heaven", the husband of the earth goddess, whom he fertilized with rain-seed. As we have seen, one South Asian animal that was certainly a counterpart of the urus bull of Western Asia is the water buffalo. This is one of the strong male

animals surrounding the buffalo-horned "Proto-Śiva" in seal M-304 from Mohenjo-daro (see Figure 56 of the crocodile paper). In Harappan as well as in Vedic and Tantric religions, all male animals were apparently considered to be manifestations of the singular primeval male, the creator god, the husband and opponent of the Goddess<sup>226</sup>. In the Indus religion this idea seems to have been expressed with images of a male deity whose body is made up of parts from different animals (cf. Figure 12). Another example is a three-headed bovine animal with a single body: each of the three animals joined together perhaps represents the primeval male at a particular time of the daily and/or yearly cycle. One of the three bovine animals united in this single beast is the unicorn (Figure 50).

The unicorn thus appears to be just one of several potential counterparts of the urus bull of Western Asia. Based on the later religious and literary traditions of India, one of the foremost local animals that could have altered the 'unicorn' image in the Indus Valley is the *ṛśya* / *ṛśya*, which in the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend is expressly connected with the concept of 'unicorn' (*ekaśṛṅga*). This animal also personifies the creator god Prajāpati in the above-discussed pivotal Vedic myth of primeval incest in Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa 3,33. But which animal is *ṛśya* / *ṛśya*? The Sanskrit dictionaries render the word as 'the male of a kind of antelope', but which antelope? Etymologically the word goes back to Proto-Aryan; the Iranian cognates (Khotan Saka *rūś* and Wakhi *rūś*) denote 'a wild mountain sheep, *Ovis poli*'<sup>227</sup>. The etymon may ultimately go back to Proto-Indo-European *\*el-* (from which English *elk* is derived)<sup>228</sup>, and the original meaning may have been 'reddish' or 'brown' (PIE *\*el-*) animal<sup>229</sup>. A variant form *ṛśa-* occurs in the Śaunaka version of the Atharvaveda (4,4,7 and 6,101,3) in a charm for the recovery of virility: "I make thy member taut, like a bowstring on a bow; mount, as it were a stag a doe, unrelaxingly always (?)."<sup>230</sup> Here, as in the myth



**Figure 50** Seal M-1171 with a composite bovine uniting protomes of the bison, the unicorn and the gazelle (after CISI 2: 136)



**Figure 51** Male and female nilgai (after Prater 1971: pl. 61)

of primeval incest in AB 3,33, the female antelope corresponding to the male *ṛś(y)a-* in Sanskrit is called *rohit-*, literally 'red'. Many dictionaries again give the meaning just as 'a kind of deer', but in Marathi the cognate *rohī* denotes the 'slate-coloured or white-footed antelope'<sup>231</sup>. Derived from Old Indo-Aryan *\*rohya-*, also originally denoting a 'red' animal, are Sindhi *rojhu* m. *rojha* f., Punjabi *rojh* f., and Hindi and Gujarati *rojh* m., all denoting 'the white-footed or painted antelope'<sup>232</sup>. This antelope is better known as the nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*, in older terminology *Antelope picta*). The Hindi name *nīlgāy* means 'blue cow', yet the females (which are hornless) and immature males are yellowish brown or reddish-fawn and only the bulls are blue-grey (Figure 51)<sup>233</sup>.

Ernest Mackay thought that the Indus 'unicorn' is "a composite of the ox and the antelope"<sup>234</sup>. He based this suggestion on the following observations:

"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 (Nos. 2, 4, 15, 18, etc.); sometimes it has transverse ridges (Nos. 6, 9, 11, etc.). In the latter case, the possibility of the creature being an ox is ruled out. The long pointed ears are also a characteristic of an antelope."<sup>235</sup>

One more distinctive feature mentioned by Mackay can be added:

"A prominent feature about this beast is the striking eye and the well-marked eye-lid above it... definitely cow-like and, moreover, set in their proper place in the head", but in other instances "the eye is entirely different and has something of the camel's eye about it."<sup>236</sup>

The eyes of the nilgai are indeed camel-like, and the camel figures also in the scientific name of the nilgai (*Boselaphus tragocamelus*) (Figure 52).

In all these respects and in some other important ones, the nilgai fits perfectly with the antelope features of the unicorn. I would like to draw particular attention to the nilgai's being like "a horselike cow... an adult bull is a handsome



**Figure 52a** Antelope-like unicorn on seal H-6 from Harappa (after CISI 3.1: 367)



**Figure 52b** Antelope-like unicorn on seal Nd-1 from Nindowari (after CISI 2: 419)

and impressive antelope. They are sturdy animals with stout legs and rather long sloping horselike necks... The whole head is long and narrow, almost horselike... The adult males are bigger than the females with noticeably higher sloping shoulders and very thick muscular necks... The horns of the male are cowlike in appearance, being black ... [but] despite the large size of the animal generally measure only 15.2—17.8 cm (6—7 in.) though 30 cm (11 ¾ in.) is on record...<sup>237</sup> As in the case of the hatchings of the neck, the natural muscular patterns of the shoulders (clearly visible in Figures 53-54) perfectly explain "the curious markings that occur on the shoulders of these animals, and of these alone," which Mackay thought "to represent trappings of some kind rather than muscles or wrinkles in the skin."<sup>238</sup> The length of the unicorn's horn differ's from that of the nilgai, but it can be understood either as a urus heritage or as a wish to emphasize this important symbol of virility; in any case, the shape is similar.

So here is the original beast behind the classical and medieval unicorn legend: in *ṛś(y)a-* / *ṛśya-* = nilgai we have an *Indian* animal, which is *horselike*, has a *deerlike head with black horns*, and is explicitly

represented as *unicorn* both in Indian folklore (*Ṛśyaśṛṅga Ekaśṛṅga*) and in Indus iconography. Moreover, being so cowlike as to be called *nīl-gāy* 'blue cow', and identified with the wild cow of Western Asia by the Harappans, this animal was worshipped as sacred<sup>239</sup>. The nilgai "bulls generally remain solitary"<sup>240</sup>, yet another characteristic of the classical unicorn. The unicorn and lion fight has a counterpart in the fact that the nilgai's "main predators are tigers and lions."<sup>241</sup> "A hundred years ago Nilgai were frequently hunted by British sportsmen on horseback and armed with spears (...). Despite their ungainly looking gallop Nilgai have great endurance and are fast runners so that this must have been a difficult sport requiring considerable skill."<sup>242</sup> This and the nilgai's horselike appearance are likely to have contributed to its confusion with the wild ass, which can drink brackish water and is therefore thought to be able to remove poison from water. "Blue bulls can survive for days without water, but they live close to waterholes."<sup>243</sup> Accordingly, a comparison usually connected with the wild ass in the *R̥gveda*<sup>244</sup> is also applied to the nilgai: Indra is invited to come and drink Soma "like a thirsting *ṛśya-* (comes to drink water)"<sup>245</sup>.



Figure 53 Nilgai bull. Photo Toby Sinclair (after Israel and Sinclair (eds.) 1989: 53)

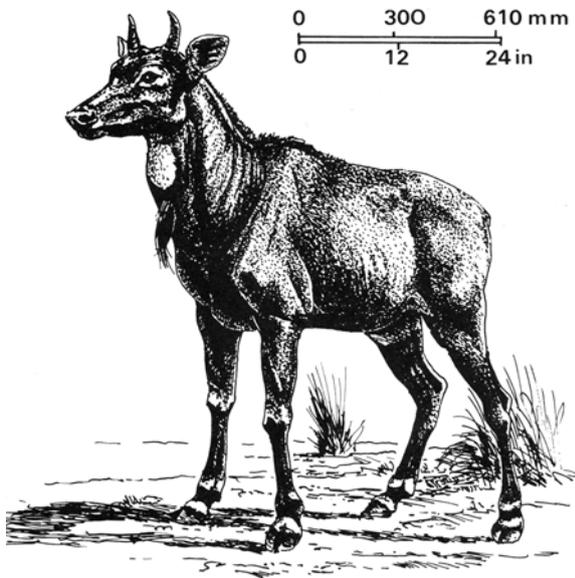


Figure 54a Nilgai bull (after Roberts 1977: 176, ill. 52)

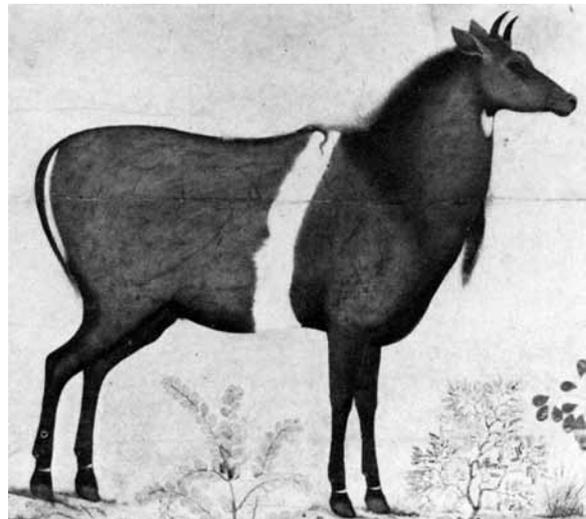


Figure 54b Nilgai bull. Mughal painting by Mansur, c. 1610, now in Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge (after *In the image of man* 1982: 104, Figure 38)

Finally, the nilgai is a *paragon of virile power* and represents the creator god, who has *sexual intercourse* with his own *virginal* daughter. The blue colour of the nilgai bull connects it with the rainclouds and thus the drought and rain motif of the Ṛśyaśṛṅga legend; moreover, "breeding can probably occur throughout the year..., though there appears to be a peak breeding season with more young being born at the beginning of the Monsoon season."<sup>246</sup>

In the vocabulary of Dravidian languages there is only one etymon<sup>247</sup> which is likely to represent the

Proto-Dravidian appellation of the nilgai. Since the nilgai is not found in southernmost India, it is not surprising that these native terms come only from the tribal languages of Central India:

Parji *guḍva* 'nilgai'

Gondi dialects:

(Mu.) *koḍa (māv)* 'a kind of deer'

(L.) *koḍā māv* 'blue bull'

(SR.) *khōḍḍa māv* 'blue bull'

(Ko.) *guriya māv* 'nilgai'

Gadaba *guri goḍ* 'bison'

Konḍa *gura* 'bison'

In Gondi, the name of the nilgai ends in the word *māv* (from Proto-Dravidian *\*māku*) 'animal, beast, deer, antelope'<sup>248</sup>, suggesting that the foregoing word *\*kuṭV-* is a qualifying attribute. It could be Proto-Dravidian *\*kuṭV(-kuṭV)*, which denotes a rapidly repeated rumbling or grumbling and rattling sound and is often used of thunder; it also means, among other things, a 'stamping noise in running' (used in Toda for buffalo), which in my opinion describes the nilgai very well, having personally seen nilgais at Dholavira, Kutch, Gujarat<sup>249</sup>. These words have coincidental homophones that probably have caused certain associations in Proto-Dravidian speakers and may have influenced their views of the nilgai, and which do remind one of details in the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend: *\*kuṭV* 'waterpot' (in Tamil also 'ascetic's pitcher')<sup>250</sup>, *\*kuṭV* 'to drink'<sup>251</sup>, and *\*kuṭV* 'hut, house, abode, home, household, family' (in South Dravidian languages also 'servant, landholder, tenant, farmer')<sup>252</sup>.

My conclusion is that the Indian Ṛṣyaśṛṅga legend goes back to the Harappan religion, where the unicorn bull depicted on thousands of seals represents a real local animal, the nilgai antelope, called *ṛṣya* in Sanskrit. His single horn, the length of which is exaggerated, has a phallic connotation and emphasizes the importance of this animal as a symbol of fertility. His cult purported to secure abundant rains that were vital for agriculture and animal husbandry, the foundations of Harappan economy. Such a role can best explain the overwhelming popularity of the unicorn as the favourite deity of many Indus seal owners.

## Notes

1) The unicorn supporter first appears on the gold coins of King James III of Scotland (c. 1480). It is supposed to

have been introduced into Scotland with the marriage of James I to Jane Beaufort, since the Beauforts as dukes of Somerset used the unicorn as a supporter on their coat-of-arms. After the Union, the unicorn became the left-hand supporter in England; in Scotland it was placed on the right. (Phillips 1911: 582.)

- 2) All words used for the unicorn in European languages are translation loans going back to Classical Greek *monókerōs*, being based on a learned literary tradition (Güntert 1929-30: 710): German *Einhorn*, English *unicorn*, Latin *unicornis*, French *licorne*, *lincorne*, Italian *licorno*, *liocorno*, *leocorno*, *leoncorno* and (most commonly used) *alicorno*, Portuguese *alicornio*, and Modern Greek *liokórno*. The French and Italian words have the Romance article (affected by the word for 'lion', *leone*, *lion*) prefixed to Latin *cornu* 'horn', while Italian *alicorno* and Portuguese *alicornio* in addition have the Arabic definite article *al-* prefixed to them (Shepard 1930: 141-142).
- 3) On the lore of the medieval unicorn, see especially Shepard 1930 and Einhorn 1976 (with extensive bibliography of further literature); Güntert 1929-30: 708-710 and Phillips 1911 offer short summaries.
- 4) Lesky 1963: 909 and Panaino 2001: 154, n. 39 with further references.
- 5) This translation is taken with slight modifications from Panaino 2001: 155, where the original Greek text is also given.
- 6) Lesky 1963: 854.
- 7) Psalms 21 (22): 22; 28 (29): 6; 77 (78): 69; 91 (92): 11; Numeri 23: 22; 24: 8; Deut. 33: 17; Hiob 39: 9; Einhorn 1976: 42-44; and Panaino 2001: 156, with the Greek and Latin translations of many of these passages cited in notes 49-53. See also Schrader 1892: 573 and 580-581, and Phillips 1911: 581. Phillips suggests that "the medieval conception of the unicorn as possessing great strength and fierceness may have been partly due to" these translations. She also points out that while the Revised Version has 'wild ox', the Authorized Version of the English Bible also has 'unicorn', "though in Deut. XXXIII.17 it obviously refers to a two-horned animal"

- (see also Schrader 1892: 580).
- 8) Translation from Panaino 2001: 169-170, where the Greek original is also given. Panaino notes that a related source, the (fictitious) description of the Marmara Sea by the Dutch priest Johannis Witte de Hese from the year 1389 more clearly reflects the Zoroastrian source, the tradition of the Three-legged Ass in the Bundahišn (see below), including the dualistic opposition of good and bad animals: "He says that still at his time some poisonous animals (*animalia venemosa*) come at twilight to infect the waters of the Sea and that the good animals (*animalia bona*) cannot drink any water; but each day, after dawn, the unicorn comes and he enters the waters purifying them from the poison and allowing other animals to drink during the day."
- 9) Modified from the translation of Panaino (2001: 156), who gives the original Greek text and further references.
- 10) On Ctesias, see Karttunen 1989: 80-85.
- 11) Photius, *Bibliotheca* 72, 45, translated by Freese 1920. Aelianus, *De natura animalium* 4,52, gives a slightly more extensive version, which essentially agrees with Photius. The Greek originals of these two versions are given by Jacoby 1958: III C no. 688, pp. 505-506.
- 12) See the summary given by Karttunen 1989: 168-171; 1997: 184-186. See also Panaino 2001: 156 and 161.
- 13) Steier 1935: 1781-2; Karttunen 1989: 168 n. 95; Panaino 2001.
- 14) On Megasthenes, see Karttunen 1997: 69-94.
- 15) On account of these uncertainties, some of these fragments are not included in the fragments of Ctesias nor Megasthenes in Felix Jacoby 1958: IIIC.
- 16) On *kartázōnos*, which denotes the rhinoceros, see Karttunen 1997: 185; Panaino 2001: 161.
- 17) Translated by Scholfield 1958: III, 289 and 291, quoted with the Greek text by Panaino 2001: 159. This is Megasthenes fragment 15 in Schwanbeck 1846: 104, but is not included in Jacoby 1958: IIIC no. 715.
- 18) See the paper on the wild asses, above, p. 66.
- 19) My translation. The Latin text is quoted by Panaino 2001: 160, n. 65: *in India et boves solidis unguis, unicornes, et feram nomine axin hinnulei pelle pluribus candidioribus maculis, sacrorum Liberi patris—(Orsaei Indi simias candentes toto corpore venantur)—asperrimam autem feram monocerotem, reliquo corpore equo similem, capite cervo, pedibus elephanto, cauda apro, mugitu gravi, uno cornu nigro media fronte cubitorum duum eminent. hanc feram vivam negant capi.*
- 20) My translation. The Latin text is quoted by Panaino 2001: 160, n. 65: *sed atrocissimus est monoceros, monstrum mugitu horrido, equino corpore, elephanti pedibus, cauda suilla, capite cervino. cornu e media fronte eius protenditur splendore mirifico, ad magnitudinem pedum quattuor, ita acutum ut quidquid impetat, facile ictu eius perforetur. vivus non venit in hominum potestatem et interim quidem potest, capi non potest.*
- 21) Transl. Jones 1930: VII, 92-93, quoted with the Greek text by Panaino 2001: 159-160. See Jacoby 1958: IIIC2, 631 no. 715 F 27b.
- 22) Slightly modified from the translation by Peck (1961: 218-221), quoted with the Greek text by Panaino 2001: 160, n. 64.
- 23) Translation by Peck (1965: 88-89), quoted with the Greek text by Panaino 2001: 160, n. 64.
- 24) Lesky 1963: 893.
- 25) Text and transl. Conybeare 1969: 234-237, quoted by Panaino 2001: 160, n. 65.
- 26) Cf. Einhorn 1976: 33 and Panaino 2001: 157, n. 59, both with further references.
- 27) The Iranian sources are cited here in (minimally modified) translations presented by Antonio Panaino (2001: 162-167), who also quotes and comments on the original texts.
- 28) Panaino (2001: 166): "The direct identification between the *xara-* of Yasna 42 and the *xar ī se pāy* is undisputed among Iranologists" (in note 160, Panaino quotes Windischmann, W. Geiger, Darmesteter, Jackson, Nyberg and Voigt).
- 29) Panaino 2001: 166.
- 30) Panaino 2001: 164-165.
- 31) Tištar is the Avestan Tištrya, who is represented by a white horse with golden ears. Panaino (2001: 167 n. 168) lists a number of features and functions in which

- Tiṣṭrya parallels the Three-legged Ass. There clearly has been some mutual adjustment between the earlier cults connected with the ass and the Irano-Aryan traditions connected with the horse.
- 32) Panaino 2001: 167.
- 33) Translation of A. V. Williams, quoted by Panaino 2001: 167.
- 34) Panaino 2001: 166, n. 162, quoting Darmesteter 1877: 147-148.
- 35) Einhorn 1976: 32; Panaino 2001: 168.
- 36) Parpola and Janhunen 2011 (in this book), note 77.
- 37) Panaino 2001: 173; the three-legged Priapus was connected with the Iranian Three-legged Ass by Albright (1920: 333).
- 38) Albright 1920: 331-332. In Lydia and Mysia (Lampsacus), the ass was sacrificed to Priapus, and in some myths he was the son of an ass. "The association of the ass with fecundity might be illustrated by a mass of evidence, mythological, pornographic, and philological. The quasi-divine nature of the ass appears in Juvenal's statement (6,334) that prominent Roman matrons consorted with the animal at the orgies of the 'Bona Dea'. That bestiality of this sort was practised elsewhere is clear from Apuleius, *Met.*, 10, 22 and Lucian's *Louíkios ē ónos*, which draws freely from Syro-Anatolian tales and customs."
- 39) Beal 1875: 124 n. 2: "The connection of this myth with the medieval story of the Unicorn being capable of capture only by a chaste maiden is too evident to require proof." See Lüders [1898] 1940: 25 n. 3. The objections made against this connection by Heinrich Günter (1922: 65-74) were annulled by Schlingloff 1973: 301-302.
- 40) The fundamental study is Lüders 1898 and 1901, reprinted in 1940: 1-43 and 47-73; see also Schroeder 1908: 292-303; Przyluski 1929; Meyer 1930: II, 540-548; Schlingloff 1973, O'Flaherty 1973: 42-52; Vasil'kov 1979; Jain 1981: 196; Simson 1986; Della Casa 1986; Panaino 2001: 150-153.
- 41) O'Flaherty 1973: 43.
- 42) O'Flaherty 1973: 43.
- 43) O'Flaherty 1973: 45.
- 44) Also in the Mahāvastu the son of the sage Kāśyapa and a doe is named Ekaśṛṅga, the reason given being that he had a single horn on his forehead. Elsewhere two horns are mentioned. See Lüders 1940: 65.
- 45) On the basis of textual history, Lüders (1940: 14, 25) thought that in the original version of the story it was the king's daughter that fetched Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. In the opinion of Moriz Winternitz (1908: I, 344, n. 2), later bards or copyists of the story found it offensive that a princess should have seduced Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and substituted her with a courtesan. Schlingloff (1973: 303), however, has pointed out that for a Brahmin, union with a courtesan is a bigger offence than the union with a princess that ended in marriage. "On the other hand, if in the original version a courtesan was the seductress, the Buddhists had a very obvious reason to replace her with a king's daughter. The Buddhists interpreted this story as a Jātaka, an event from one of the previous lives of the Buddha. The young ascetic was identified with the Buddha and his mate accordingly with his wife. Thus the seductress could not very well be a courtesan but had to be of royal blood like the wife of the Buddha." Simson (1986: 207-208) suggests that the story may have involved two women from the beginning, the courtesan seducing Ṛṣyaśṛṅga and bringing him to the king's palace, where the princess married him and got children: the marriage motif is well attested, and no version has the courtesan bringing Ṛṣyaśṛṅga to the palace and marrying him there. Schroeder (1908: 300) derives the two women from the archaic cultic drama of the mahāvratā, where a prostitute performs the sexual union; he suggests that here the prostitute personifies the king's daughter. I would like to point out that in a parallel 'sacred marriage' of the Vedic horse sacrifice, the king's chief queen (who represents the earth goddess) lies down with the sacrificed stallion that has remained celibate for one year until that point.
- 46) O'Flaherty 1973: 45-46.
- 47) O'Flaherty 1973: 44.
- 48) Lüders 1940: 16-18; Przyluski 1929: 333-337; Goldman 1985: 74-76, 139-161 and 292-323; Simson 1986: 206-

- 207.
- 49) Simson 1986: 206.
- 50) Schlingloff 1973: 304-305: "Here we have a version where the abduction to the city is well motivated. The king allures the jungleman to win him over as brother and friend. This exactly is the motive in the Enkidu episode of the Gilgamesh epic" (p. 305). Simson (1986: 219-221), however, thinks that this version is not particularly old (and that it may be a psychologically motivated transformation of the Mahāvastu version).
- 51) Sivaramamurti 1981: 15.
- 52) The JUB has the older Vedic spelling of the name, Ṛṣyaśṛṅga, with a palatal sibilant instead of the later retroflex sibilant of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga.
- 53) Hermann Berger (1971) has proposed a Dravidian etymology for the name Vibhāṅḍaka; Simson (1986: 203 and 223) accepts this, but I find it unconvincing.
- 54) Lüders (1940: 1) points out that the Ṛṣya mentioned in Bhāgavata-Purāṇa 9,22,11 is a different person, since he is the son of Devātithi. Lüders likewise dismisses the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga mentioned in the Sarvānukramaṇī as the seer of Ṛgveda 10,136,7, since he and his six brothers are said to be sons of Vātaraśana. Simson (1986: 223) thinks that on the basis of the verse's content the author may nevertheless be associated with the Ṛṣyaśṛṅga of the legend, but does not go further into the matter. I would like to point out that the 'sages having ropes of the wind' mentioned in the verse can be linked with the cosmic banyan tree growing up to the pole star, which holds up the stars and planets with its invisible aerial 'ropes of wind' bound to the heavenly bodies (Parpola 1994: 244-245; 1998: 258). That the Harappan religion included the concept of a heavenly banyan or pipal tree is suggested by an Indus tablet (H-179), where a fig tree with a deity inside is surrounded on either side by a star figure (Parpola 1994: 244, fig. 14.5). In the Indus seal M-296, a unicorn protome sticks out of a pipal tree that tops the 'sacrificial stand' regularly placed in front of the unicorn.
- 55) Simson (1986: 223) has already pointed out that the probable connection of this sāman with the male member in PB 5,4,13-14 can be a further testimony of Ṛṣyaśṛṅga's connection with the sexual sphere.
- 56) Ed. Sāmaśramī 1876: II, 324.
- 57) Burnell's edition of the Jaiminīya-Ārṣeya-Brāhmaṇa reads *bhūteśaṃ ca sāma vā*, while the manuscripts of Jaiminīya-Āraṇyaka-Gāna 1,9,4 have *ṛśyasya vṛataṃ bhūtecchandāsāṃ vā* (Caland 1907: 25 and Makarabhūṣaṇa 2000: 33). In connection with the mahāvṛata, Taittirīya-Saṃhitā 7,5,9,4 mentions *bhūtechādāṃ sāmāni*, Śāṅkhāyana-Āraṇyaka 1,4 *bhūtecchādāṃ* (variant readings: *bhūtecchāṃdām*, *bhūtecchāṃdāmsi*, *bhūtecchāṃdasāṃ*, see Bhim Dev 1980: 5) *sāma* (adding: *priyam indrasya dhāmopajagāmeti*). See Caland 1931: 79-80. Outside Sāmaveda, the term *bhūte-cchād-* is used of the Atharvavedic verses 20,135,11-13 belonging to the *kuntāpa* verses and employed at the mahāvṛata; the expression *bhūte-cchād-* is not found in these verses, but Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa 6,36,1-2 glosses them with *bhūtaṃ chādāyitvā* (see Debrunner 1957: 63), which Keith (1920: 287) translates "having obscured the might (of the [demonical] Asuras)".
- 58) This verse is as follows: *harī ta indra śmaśrūṇy uto te haritā harī | taṃ tvā stuvanti kāraṇaḥ puruṣāso vanargavaḥ ||* "Tawny are your beard-hairs, O Indra, and tawny are your two steeds; singers, *men roaming in the wilds (or: in the forest)*, praise you as such."
- 59) Ed. Sāmaśramī 1876: II, 538.
- 60) The stobha text runs as follows: *ṛśyāsa indra bhūññ iti maghavann indra bhūññ iti pra bhūññ iti indras tasarapūtaḥ ||*
- 61) Renou 1952: 109.
- 62) Caland 1931: 78 on PB 5,4,14.
- 63) This fire(place), from which all other sacrificial fires are taken, represents the womb; such symbolism seems significant in the present context.
- 64) Note that in Ṛgveda 10,109,5 the celibate student (*brahmacārin-*) "becomes one member (*ekam aṅgam*) of the gods". On this verse, the only one in the Ṛgveda to have the word *brahmacārin-*, see Kajihara 2001: 28 and 35-37.
- 65) Caland 1931: 78.

- 66) Cf. Jaiminīya-Brāhmaṇa 2,403: *yad v eva prati bhūtechandāsām vratena stuvate | harī ta indra śmaśrūny uto te haritā harī | taṃ tvā stuvanti kāraṇaḥ puruṣāso vanargavaḥ || ṛśyāsa indra bhūñi iti maghavann indra bhūñi iti pra bhūñi itīndras trasarapūtaḥ (tasarapūtaḥ is the original reading of the Śātyāyanaka according to Sāyaṇa) || iti (thus Sāyaṇa : sphigi JB) punaḥ punas tasarasphigir iti | etāvadd ha vā asyaikam aṅgam anāstutam āsa yat sphigau | anāstutenainam aṅgena stuvanti | ṛddhiṣṇavo ha bhavanty enena tuṣṭuvānāḥ.*
- 67) On *tasara-* and its (later) variant *trasara-*, see Mayrhofer 1992: I,639-640.
- 68) "Again and again" appears to refer to the repeated interjection *bhuñ*.
- 69) I take *tasarasphigir* as a bahuvrīhi compound.
- 70) The dictionaries give only the meanings 'buttock' and 'hip' for Sanskrit *sphigī-* and *sphij-* (on this etymon, see Mayrhofer 1996: II, 777). Here it should refer to the female organ where Indra's member is understood to be (like Greek, *pugē*, English *behind* and Finnish *perse*, all primarily denoting 'buttocks').
- 71) The passage is in the unpublished Paryadhyāya section that I am currently in the process of editing: JŚS 3,39,19 *māgadhaṃ ca puṃścalūṃ ca dakṣiṇe vedyante mithunā upakalpayanti*, 20 *tāv abhimantrayate ahaṃ daivyaṃ mithunaṃ gāsyāmi yuvaṃ mānuṣaṃ mithunaṃ caratam iti*, 21 *yadā sāma prastūyātā atha saṃvartayātād iti*, 22 *atha yadi sāmāparimādaḥ kuryād etasmin kāle kuryād*, 23 *yathā bhavati brāhmaṇam*. According to this text, the performance of even the sāmāparimāds was optional; this probably means that they were becoming obsolete.
- 72) Caland 1931: xx.
- 73) Cf. Lāṭyāyana-Śrautasūtra 4,3,10-11: *sā brūyād duścaritinn avakīrñinn iti | dhik tvā jālmi puṃścali grāmasya mārjani puruṣasya puruṣasya śiṣṇapraṇajanīti brahmacāri*. See Rolland 1973: 66.
- 74) *sitiṅga-* 'whitefooted': could this refer to the nilgai, which is also called 'whitefooted antelope' (on account of the prominent white spots in its feet)?
- 75) Kajihara 2002: 116 and 126-129.
- 76) According to Hillebrandt (1890) and Schroeder (1908: 298), the mahāvratā celebrated the summer solstice: this would agree with the symbolism involved here (i.e., a long period of heat/ascetic celibacy (*tapas*) ending with the rains/shedding of seed. Other scholars, however, connect the mahāvratā with the beginning of the year and the winter solstice (see Rolland 1973: 58-60). Similar sexual symbolism was indeed connected with the beginning of the year, which in my opinion was originally connected with the vernal equinox: the birth of Rudra/Skanda is associated with the Pleiades (see Parpola 1994: 205-206).
- 77) Schroeder (1908: 298-302) interpreted the Ṛśyaśṛṅga legend as a poetic version of this sexual union in the Vedic mahāvratā ritual, which he considered to be a dramatized rain charm performed at the summer solstice. While some scholars approve of the connection between the Ṛśyaśṛṅga legend and the mahāvratā (O'Flaherty 1973: 51; Simson 1986: 224), others find it far-fetched (Panaino 2001: 151 n. 20). The express connection of the sage Ṛśya with a sexually loaded song, chanted during the union of the ascetic student and the prostitute at the mahāvratā, makes the connection rather compelling.
- 78) Ungnad and Gressmann 1911: 95, n. 2.
- 79) Jensen 1913: 528; 1928: II, 108-112.
- 80) Schlingloff 1973: 305.
- 81) Panaino 2001: 170, with reference to Della Casa 1986: 17, 23-24. See also Albright 1920: 329-330 (quoted below in note 81) and O'Flaherty 1973: 50: "Much of the Ṛśyaśṛṅga story resembles the tale of Enkidu in the Gilgamesh Epic ... There may be a historical link between the myths of Enkidu and Ṛśyaśṛṅga ... for ties have been established between the Indus Valley and Babylonian civilizations."
- 82) Hämeen-Anttila 2000: 9-29.
- 83) This removes Albright's (1920: 331) objection against the assumption that the Ṛśyaśṛṅga legend is a direct loan from the Gilgamesh epic: "Jensen is certainly wrong in seeing here a direct loan from GE, as the gazelle-mother does not occur in the latter. But it is very probable that our story goes back eventually to a Mesopotamian

- origin; in no other case that I have seen is the likelihood so great."
- 84) Tablet VIII, lines 3-4 <sup>d</sup>EN.KI.[DÙ] AMA-ka *ša-bi-ti / ù a-ka-a-nu a-bu-ka ib-[nu]-ka ka-a-ša*; cf. Simo Parpola 1997a: 99 and Panaino 2001: 149 and 153 with further references.
- 85) This probably refers to Enkidu's auto-castration connected with the esoteric cult of the Goddess, which seems to be implied in tablet VI of the epic: Enkidu cuts off the "right hand" of the Bull of Heaven and flings it at the face of Goddess Ištar; cf. Simo Parpola 1997b: xcii-xciii, xcvi-xcvii, notes 119 and 139-140; Panaino 2001: 172.
- 86) Panaino 2001: 173, n. 190.
- 87) Mackay 1931: II, 382. According to Atre (1985: 1), 70% all square seals at Mohenjo-daro with a boss have the 'unicorn' motif; at Harappa the number is 77%. According to Franke-Vogt (1991: I, 62), the 'unicorn' constitutes 58.3% of all identifiable main motifs on the seals of all types excavated at Mohenjo-daro, and 80% of those excavated at Chanhu-daro.
- 88) Marshall 1931: I, 69 n. 1: "According to Pliny, the oryx, the Indian ass, and an Indian ox were all one-horned (NH. viii.30; xi.106)." Marshall comments on Schrader's (1892) suggestion that Ctesias wrote of the unicorn bulls of Persepolis: "But it is now obvious that the idea of a one-horned ox is much older than Achaemenian times."
- 89) In his recent, still unpublished paper, Mark Kenoyer (2009) argues that the Harappans independently from the West invented a mythical animal with just one horn.
- 90) Exclusive connections with South Asian fauna, however, do not preclude the possibility that the underlying concept was borrowed from Western Asia and adjusted to the local environmental conditions by means of suitable replacements.
- 91) The fabulous animal in Figure 12 has "the horns of the zebu, the face of man, the tusks and the trunk of the elephant, the neck and front legs of the goat, the middle body of the 'unicorn', the hind legs of the tiger, and the snake for a tail" (CISI 1: xxxi). In my opinion, this composite animal represents the creator god of the Harappans, the primeval male, who, like the Vedic Puruṣa-Prajāpati, is the male of all animal species; the various male beasts surrounding the seated 'Proto-Śiva' on the well-known Indus seal M-304 convey the same message. On the copper tablets from Mohenjo-daro there are a number of other composite animals, such as the zebu (the horns) + the tiger (the head and front part of the body) + the rhinoceros (the back part of the body); the markhor goat + the 'unicorn' (see CISI 1: xxxi).
- 92) Mackay 1938: I, 326.
- 93) Marshall 1931: I, 68-69.
- 94) See also Franke-Vogt 1991: I, 62.
- 95) These unicorn statuettes form one of the focal points of Kenoyer's 2009 paper. The first to be excavated was found in 1929 at Chanhu-daro by M. G. Majumdar (1934: pl. XXI: 4), who already commented that that the 'unicorn' "may after all have been intended for an one-horned animal, not a two-horned creature seen in profile." In 1935-36, Ernest Mackay found further examples at Chanhu-daro, comparing them to the unicorn ass of Ctesias and other classical authors (Mackay 1943: 157 and pl. LV: 10, 11, 13-15 and LVI: 2; Franke-Vogt 1991: I, 62 n. 15) (Figure 16). There are examples from Mohenjo-daro and Harappa as well (Kenoyer 1998: Figure 5.15).
- 96) In the CISI, these two-horned variants have been erroneously conflated with a somewhat similar animal with two long somewhat forward-bending horns. This animal, which is usually without the 'cult stand' of the unicorn (though M-233 has it), has been correctly identified by Franke-Vogt (1991: I, 69, motif 8b, no. 168) as an antelope or gazelle, most probably the Indian gazelle alias chinkara (*Gazella gazella bennetti*) that she mentions as a possible model for this motif.
- 97) Grigson 1984: 168.
- 98) There is considerable variation in the depiction of the 'unicorn' and the 'cult stand'; see Franke-Vogt 1991: I, 113-118; II, Plate 43-44, and CISI 2 (1991): xxxi and 433.

- 99) The 'cult stand' is only very exceptionally placed in front of other animals, such as the rhinoceros in M-1135, the elephant in one roughly made terracotta seal from Allah-dino (Ad 8 in CISI 2: 388), a 'horned tiger' in a seal from Banawali (B-17 in CISI 1: 346), and the goat on a seal from Lothal (L-48). Animals other than the 'unicorn', even wild animals like the tiger and the rhinoceros, usually have what looks like a trough in front of them. In the copper tablets from Mohenjo-daro, such a trough is placed also in front of the unicorn (cf. M-519 and M-520 in CISI 1: 130 and Parpola 1994: 111-112, Figure 7.14 ('unicorn' in type B1).
- 100) This whorl composition resembles the 'radial and whorl compositions' of the later (early second millennium BCE) Dilmun type seals of the Gulf (Laursen 2010: 109-110). There is much evidence of a close contact between the Harappans and the peoples of eastern Arabia, where the circular 'Gulf type' seal developed under Indus influence c. 2100-2000 BCE (Laursen 2010). Most of the Indus seals found in the Gulf are circular and have as their iconography the Indian bison or gaur (*Bos gaurus*), which has been adopted also in the 'Gulf type' seals. I have wondered if "perhaps it was in Iran (Susa) that the Near Eastern Indus traders first adopted the local circular form for their seals, which were then to become the models of the Gulf seals" (Parpola 1994: 315). Laursen (2010: 129) has now further evidence pointing in this direction. Circular seals are rare in the Indus Valley, and M-417 has been long considered to be due to western influence on Harappan iconography. It seems significant that the closest early Western Asiatic parallel appears to be supplied by a Proto-Elamite seal coming from ancient Anshan (present Tell-i Malyan) in western Iran (Amiet 1980: 510-511 Plate 126 no. 1688).
- 101) As noted earlier (in section 2 above), the Septuaginta translation of the Old Testament renders the Hebrew word for 'wild bull' with Greek *monókerōs* 'unicorn'.
- 102) Scheftelowitz 1912; MacCulloch 1913.
- 103) Somadeva's Yaśastilaka of the 10th century (ed. Kāvyamālā 70, Vol. I, p. 461, lines 7-8), glossed with the word *ganḍaka* by the commentator Śrutadeva (quoted from Simson 1986: 217 and 226, note 48).
- 104) On the horn as a phallic symbol, see Einhorn 1976: 264-269 with further literature; Panaino 2001: 153.
- 105) Beer 2003: 48.
- 106) Shepard 1930: 292, n. 133.
- 107) Kenoyer 2009.
- 108) Vārttika 3 on Pāṇini 5,2,122 (*śṛṅgavṛndābhyām āraḥan*) derives *śṛṅgāraka-* from *śṛṅga-*.
- 109) Reference to this is made also by Simson 1986: 217.
- 110) Mahābhārata (Bombay ed. 3,142,28-47, crit. ed. app. 16,56-95) *idaṃ dvitīyam aparāṃ viṣṇoḥ karma prakāśate | naṣṭā vasumatī kṛtsnā pātāle caiva majjitā | punar uddhāritā tena vārāhenaikaśṛṅgiṇā | ... | tato varāhaḥ saṃvṛtta ekaśṛṅgo mahādutyūḥ | ... | sa grhītvā vasumatīm śṛṅgenaikena bhāsvatā | yojanānām śataṃ vīra samuddharati so 'kṣaraḥ*. In 13,149,70, this boar incarnation is *mahāśṛṅga-*.
- 111) In the Mahābhārata (3,142,28ff. and elsewhere), the sinking of the earth is ascribed to the increase of living beings on the earth to such an extent that the supporter of all beings became unable to bear such a heavy load; see Gonda 1954: 139-140; Gail 1977: 134. According to most classical accounts of Viṣṇu's boar incarnation, the evil demon Hiraṇyākṣa ('having golden eyes') had seized the earth and carried it down to the bottom of the ocean; Viṣṇu then became a boar, dove into the ocean, slew the demon, and rescued the earth by raising her up. For a detailed text-historical study of the variants, see Gail 1977.
- 112) See Gail 1977: 145-166 for the iconography and its evolution.
- 113) Rāmāyaṇa 2,102,2 *imaṃ lokasaṃpattim lokanātha nibodha me | sarvaṃ salīlam evāsīt pṛthivī yatra nirmitā | tataḥ samabhavad brahmā svayambhūr daivataiḥ saha, 3 sa varāhas tato bhūtvā projjabhāra vasumdhārām | asṛjac ca jagat sarvaṃ saha putraiḥ kṛtātmbabhiḥ*.
- 114) Taittirīya-Saṃhitā 7,1,5,1-2.
- 115) Taittirīya-Brāhmaṇa 1,1,3,5-6.
- 116) In Mahābhārata 3,272,54, Viṣṇu in the shape of a boar roars like thunderclouds and is as black as they

- are. In northern Europe, too, grunting hogs and boars were believed to represent thunderclouds and their tusks lightning; see Gonda 1954: 129.
- 117) The name Emūṣa is taken from another myth associated with the wild boar, where the boar killed by Indra is a sacrificial victim; the Sacrifice (*yajña*) is equated here with Viṣṇu (who in this role undoubtedly has succeeded the creator god Prajāpati). This myth is found in the four oldest texts of the Black Yajurveda, among them Maitrāyaṇī Saṃhitā 3,8,3 and Taittirīya Saṃhitā 6,2,4,2-3, and then continued in Purāṇic texts (Macdonell 1895: 180-181; Gonda 1954: 137-138; Gail 1977: 128-130). The name Emūṣa consists of three syllables, of which the middle one is long, a pattern that together with the suffix *-ūṣa-* suggests its origin in the language of the Bactria and Margiana Archaeological Complex, or BMAC (see Lubotsky 2001: 303 with Parpola 2002c: 92-94). The boar has a prominent place in the BMAC iconography.
- 118) Śatapatha-Brāhmaṇa 14,1,2,11 *atha varābhavītam / iyaty agra āsīd (VS 37,5) itiyatī ha vā iyam agre pṛthivy āsa prādesamātrī tām emūsa iti varāba ujjaghāna so 'syāḥ patih prajāpatis tenaivainam etan mithunena priyena dhāmnā samardhayati kṛtsnam karoti.*
- 119) Gonda 1954: 142: The Mahābhārata, too, depicts Naraka as a demon who is the son of the Earth; in 12,209,7 Naraka is the first of the demons to be destroyed by Viṣṇu in his boar shape.
- 120) For a summary, partial translation and discussion of this version of the myth, see Meyer 1937: II, 51-56. Meyer's references differ from the Kālikāpurāṇa editions by B. Śāstrī (1972 and 1991) used here; the latter one includes an introduction (which among other things discusses the Naraka myth) and an English translation. The Naraka myth is also narrated in the Old Javanese Bhomakāwya (2,1-9) and its Malay version (on these see Gonda 1954: 143).
- 121) Kālikāpurāṇa 29,23-26 *viśeṣatas tvayā pṛthivī sakāmādharsitā jale / stridharminī tvattejobhiḥ sādhdā garbhaṃ ca dāruṇam / rajasvalā kṣamā garbhaṃ yam ādhatta jagatpate / tasmād yas tanayo bhāvi so 'py ādāsyati duryasaḥ / eṣa prāpyāsuraṃ bhāvaṃ devagandharvahimsakaḥ / bhaviṣyatīti lokesaḥ prāha mām dakṣasannidhau / malinīratisamjātaṃ duṣṭam te 'niṣṭakārakam / kāmukaṃ tyaja lokesa vārāham kāyam idṛśam /*
- 122) Kālikāpurāṇa 36,28-32 *pṛthivy uvāca: na garbbabhāraṃ samvoḍhuṃ mādavāhaṃ kṣamādhunā / bhṛṣam nityam viśīdāmi tasmāt tvaṃ trātum arhasi / tvayā varāharūpena malinī kāmītā purā / tena kāmēna kuksau me yo garbho 'yaṃ tvayāhitaḥ / kāle prāpte 'pi garbho 'yaṃ na pracyavati mādharma / kaṭhoragarbhā tenāhaṃ pīḍitāsmi dine dine / yadi na trāhi mām deva garbhaduḥkhāj jagatpate / na cirād eva yāsyāmi mṛtyor vaśam asaṃsayaṃ / kayāpi nedṛśo garbbah pūrvaṃ mādharma vai dhṛtaḥ / yo 'calāṃ cālayati mām sarasīm iva kuñjaraḥ.*
- 123) Kālikāpurāṇa 37,33 *gatvā videharājasya yajñabhūmiṃ tadā kṣitih / suṣuve tanayam vīraṃ yatra sitā purābhavat.*
- 124) Kālikāpurāṇa 37,12-15 *nāradasyopadeśena yajñabhūmiṃ tato nṛpaḥ / halena dārayām āsa yajñavātāv adhi svayam / tad bhūmijātasitāyām śubhām kanyām samutthitām / lebhe rājā mudā yuktaḥ sarvalakṣaṇasaṃyutām / tasyām ca jātāmātrāyām pṛthivy antarhitā svayam / jagāda vacanaṃ cedam gautamaṃ nāradaṃ nṛpam / eṣā sutā mayā dattā tava rājan manoharā / enām grhāna subhagām kuladvataśubhāvahām.*
- 125) The phallic significance of the single tusk (and the single horn; see Meyer 1937: III,301) is "in perfect harmony with the generative function of the boar" (Gonda 1954: 144, n. 93). Defourny (1976: 19, n. 7) refers to the authorities just quoted, but curiously maintains that "rien dans le mythe de Varāha ne permet d'assimiler la corne au phallus." His rather peculiar suggestion is that the horn in general, and the single horn in particular (due to its vertical nature, pointing towards the sky), is "salvatrice ... ou signe du salut." In the case of the boar myth, the key passage for Defourny is the identification of the single horn of the sacrificial boar with the sacrificial stake (*yūpadaṃṣṭraḥ* in Matsya-Purāṇa 248,67), which is "unique et vertical lui aussi" (Defourny 1976: 21): the sacrificial stake is the axis mundi that connects the world to heaven (p. 22).

- 126) Gonda 1954: 134.
- 127) Gonda 1954: 133.
- 128) Burrow and Emeneau 1984: 67, DEDR no. 688.  
According to German folklore (which has counterparts elsewhere), the boar by rooting up the soil taught the art of ploughing to man (cf. Gonda 1954: 133).
- 129) Roberts 1977: 166.
- 130) On the birth of Sītā out of the furrow ploughed by King Janaka (related in Rāmāyaṇa 1,66,14-15) in terms of an incestuous sexual intercourse, and on Janaka's identity with Prajāpati (alias Brahmā) and Bala-Rāma who uses the plough as his weapon (= Rāma, the husband of Sītā), see Parpola 2002b: 367.
- 131) Cf. Rīgveda 10,90 and Parpola 2007: this idea is behind the human sacrifice (*puruṣamedha*), which has existed in India but not during early Vedic times.
- 132) Cf. Kālikāpurāṇa 29-31 and Meyer 1937: II, 54-55.
- 133) Mayrhofer 1996: II, 37.
- 134) Naraka got his name when as a newborn baby he was found lying on Janaka's sacrificial ground with his head on a human skull (Kālikāpurāṇa 38,2 *narasya śīrṣe svaśīro nidhāya sbitavān yataḥ | tasmāt tasya munisreṣṭho narakaṃ ṇāma vai vyadhāt*).
- 135) See also Meyer 1937: II, 41-56.
- 136) Cf. Kālikāpurāṇa 29,24-31 *vārāho 'pi svayaṃ gatvā lokālokāhvayaṃ girim | vārāhyā saha reme sa pṛthivyā cārurūpayā | sa tayā ramamāṇas tu suciraṃ parvatottame | nāvāpa toṣaṃ lokeśaḥ potri paramakāmukaḥ | pṛthivyāḥ potrirūpāyā ramayantyās tataḥ sutāḥ | trayo jātā dvijaśreṣṭhās teśāṃ nāmāni me śṛṇu | suvṛttaḥ kanako ghorāḥ sarva eva mahābalāḥ | śīsavas te merupṛṣṭhe kāñcane vaprasaṃstare | remire 'nyonyasaṃsaktā gahvareṣu saraḥsu ca | sa taiḥ putraiḥ parivṛto vārāho bhāryayā svayā | ramamāṇas tadā kāyatyāgaṃ naivāgaṇad dhiyā | kadā cic chiśubhis tais saṃśliṣṭaḥ kardamāntare | cakāra kardamakriḍāṃ bhāryayā ca mahābalaḥ | sapaṅkalepaḥ śuśubhe varāho madhupiṅgalaḥ*. Cf also Meyer 1937: II, 55.
- 137) Roberts 1977: 165, map 64.
- 138) Whether the Harappans had domestic pigs is uncertain.  
"Domestic pigs are identified (2-3 per cent) at Harappan sites mostly from the Mature Harappan and Post-Urban periods... Both at Kuntasi and Shikarpur, piglets were killed in large numbers." (Thomas 2002: 411)
- 139) See section 3 as well as footnote 25 in the wild ass paper contained in this book. Footnotes 32 and 92 discuss the Proto-Dravidian word *\*kaṣ(i)* 'saline soil', the habitat of the wild ass (apparently forming the first part of the Proto-Dravidian name *\*kaṣutai* of the wild ass), as well as its likely derivation as 'waste land' from the Proto-Dravidian root *\*kaṣi*, the meanings of which include 'wasting, discarding, excreta, becoming ruined' and 'dying', and which may be connected with Kali, the god of gambling and ruin.
- 140) See Krishan 1999: 39-40 for quotations from many Purāṇa texts using the term *mala*.
- 141) Dange 1987: II, 577.
- 142) A Proto-Dravidian word for 'rubbish heap' is *\*kumppV* (DEDR 1731, 1741), which has also denoted the swelling protuberance of the male gharial's snout (which has a phallic connotation). The same Proto-Dravidian word is very probably also the source of Sanskrit *kumbha-* when it refers to the two protuberances on the upper part of the elephant's forehead, which swell in the rutting season (see the discussion of Sanskrit *kumbhira-* in the crocodile paper in this book). *Kumbha* and *Nikumbha* are known as the names of two demon brothers, and at least *Nikumbha* is among the names of the elephant-headed god Gaṇeśa (see Krishan 1999: 127 quoting Vāyu-Purāṇa 2,30). In Tamil, *kuppam* 'dungheap' has a male proper name *Kuppan* derived from it: parents who have lost many babies may give it to their newborn son to avert the interest of evil spirits seeking after the blood of newborn babies.
- 143) Allchin 1963: 133-135.
- 144) Allchin 1963: 127-133.
- 145) Allchin 1963.
- 146) See section 4 in the wild ass paper.
- 147) Lunar features in Gaṇeśa include his round stomach full of sweets; the special day of his worship is the 4th day of the bright half of the month, when the sickle of the new moon appears.

- 148) For these features uniting Rudra, the Vināyakas, Skanda and Gaṇapati, see Krishan 1999: 20-22, 55 and 126-135.
- 149) Gonda (1954: 139 n 62, with many references) has pointed out that "the sun-god (or a god related to the sun) not seldom marries the earth."
- 150) See Macdonell 1895: 185 with n. 3.
- 151) Gaṇeśa, too, is connected with the planet Mars; the auspicious weekday associated with him is Tuesday, the day of the planet Mars.
- 152) The planet Mars (whole names include *Rudhira*- 'red', 'blood') was born out of a drop of the Goddess' menstrual blood, which fell to earth during her sexual union with Śiva. Cf. Bhaviṣya-Purāṇa, Brāhma-khaṇḍa, 31,17-18: *purā maithunam āsritya sthitābhyāṃ tu himācale | bhīmomābhyāṃ mahābāho raktabinduś cyutaḥ kṣītau | medinyā saprayatnena sukheṇa vidbhṛto 'nayā | jāto 'syāḥ sa kujo vīraḥ rakte raktasamudbhavaḥ*.
- 153) According to the Rāmāyana (4,42), the wicked demon Naraka lived in the golden town of Prāgjyotiṣa, the name of which refers to the 'light of the east'. This associates him with Skanda, who among other things symbolizes the young morning sun. According to the Mahābhārata, Naraka stole the pair of ear-rings from Aditi (the mother of gods) and kept them at Prāgjyotiṣa (5,48,80), whence they were recovered by Kṛṣṇa (3,12,17) and given to the sun-god Sūrya (3,307,21) (Gonda 1954: 142, n. 81). A pair of earrings appears to be the pictorial meaning of the Indus sign used as a rebus (Proto-Dravidian \**muruku* 'ear-ring, bangle') to signify the name of the god Muruku "Youth" (who in the Tamil religion is the counterpart of Rudra and Skanda, both called Kumāra 'Youth'; see Parpola 1994a: 225-230).
- 154) Krishan 1999: 47.
- 155) Martin-Dubost 1997: 218 and 228.
- 156) See Krishan 1999: 45-48.
- 157) Condensed from Krishan 1999: 46, based on Rao 1914: I (1), 50-51; the myth is said to be found in the Brahmavaivarta-Purāṇa.
- 158) *ekah sa eva parpālayatāj jaganti | gaurīgiriśacaritānukṛtiṃ dadhānaḥ | ābhāti yo*
- daśanaśūnyamukhaikadeśa- | dehārdhabāritavadbūka*  
*ivaikadantaḥ ||* Translated by Daniel H. H. Ingalls (Sternbach 1980: IV, 1861 no. 7437; Krishan 1999: 47-48 and 65 n. 37).
- 159) Cunningham 1875: 108.
- 160) Fuller 2006: 25-26; Wikipedia s.v. Aurochs.
- 161) Meadow and Patel 2002: 396; Fuller 2006: 26.
- 162) Meadow 1986: 54-55.
- 163) Fuller 2006: 26.
- 164) The zebu has been identified inter alia at Tepe Yahya and Shahr-i Sokhta; see Meadow 1987: 898 and Grigson 1996: 43-44.
- 165) Bökönyi 1997; Fuller 2006: 26.
- 166) Edwards, Magee, Park *et al.* 2010.
- 167) Black and Green 1992: 103.
- 168) F. E. Zeuner (1963: 236-238), Raymond and Bridget Allchin (1974: 71 n. 1) and Gregory L. Possehl (1999: 175; 2002: 131). Ute Franke-Vogt (1991: I, 62-64), providing comprehensive coverage of the data relating to the 'unicorn' and their interpretation, also identifies the animal as the urus (*Bos primigenius primigenius*), although she confesses that this is controversial.
- 169) It is almost certain that Harappan sailors did import a small number of water buffaloes from the Indus Valley to Mesopotamia during the reign of Sargon the Great (2334-2279 BCE); this is the period when the water buffalo suddenly replaced the humpless *Bos primigenius* in Akkadian glyptics (Boehmer 1975; Parpola 1984; 1994: 246-256).
- 170) Cf. Parpola 1984; 1994: 246-256; 2011.
- 171) Francfort and Tremblay 2010: 104.
- 172) Jarrige 1988; Parpola 2005a.
- 173) Parpola 1988; 2005b; 2009.
- 174) I have written on this theme many times since the early 1980s (Parpola 1984a; 1984b; 1985; 1988: 252-263; 1992; 1994: 246-272; 1999; 2002a; 2002b; 2011) and hope to be excused for repeating here what I have said before (especially in my retreatment of the 'contest' motif in 2011). I shall try to restrict myself to the essentials.
- 175) Amiet 1980: no. 585.

- 176) Porada 1950; Amiet 1980: 109.
- 177) In the Sanskrit epics of India, the warrior kills with arrows "like the sun" (kills with arrow-like hot rays) (Hopkins 1915: 85).
- 178) Amiet 1980: 109.
- 179) Black and Green 1992: 112-113. "A variety of cosmological ideas were current at different periods of Mesopotamian history. The earlier, Sumerian, view of cosmology seems to have been one of a dipartite universe consisting of *an* (heaven) and *ki* (earth, including the underworld) (see *Du-ku*). Originally united and inhabited only by gods, they were at a primordial time separated from each other." (Black and Green 1992: 52)
- 180) Amiet 1980: 137 with references in n. 46.
- 181) For example, in Sanskrit 'rain' is *varṣa-*, from the same root as *vr̥ṣan-* m. 'manly animal, bull, stallion and *vr̥ṣabha-* m. 'bull' (Mayrhofer 1996: II, 522f. and 575f.).
- 182) On the Kubaba/Kybele and her cult, see Vermaseren 1977.
- 183) For the following, see especially Maag 1961 and Hörig 1979.
- 184) Black and Green 1992: 108-109.
- 185) Hörig 1979: 187.
- 186) Black and Green 1992: 72-73.
- 187) Black and Green 1992: 158.
- 188) Lapinkivi 2004: 245.
- 189) Lapinkivi 2004: 247-248.
- 190) Black and Green 1992: 108-109.
- 191) Potts 2001.
- 192) Potts 2001.
- 193) Stietenron 1983.
- 194) *Kālikā-Purāṇa* 63, 19-23, transl. Kooij 1972: 121.
- 195) Parpola 2002: 260-291.
- 196) Beck 1981.
- 197) Rolland 1973; Parpola 1999.
- 198) Parpola 2007.
- 199) Cf. Allchin 1985; Parpola 1994: 256, with further literature on p. 300.
- 200) Parpola 2002a.
- 201) Cf. Parpola 1984.
- 202) The popular identification of the two heroes in the 'contest' motif as Gilgamesh and Enkidu is considered incorrect (Black and Green 1992: 91).
- 203) Black and Green 1992: 49; 89-90, 109; Leick 1991: 70.
- 204) Borger 1975: 413.
- 205) Hartner 1965: 16; 1985: 737-738; Panaino 2001: 157, n. 59.
- 206) On Aldebaran and the 'third eye', see Parpola 1994: 261-272; 1998: 240-252.
- 207) C. J. Gadd quoted by Mackay 1931: I, 356 n. 2; Wheeler 1968: 87.
- 208) Sarianidi 1979: 654; Parpola 1985: 75.
- 209) Ardeleanu-Jansen 1989; Parpola 1985: 156.
- 210) Wheeler 1968: 87.
- 211) Parpola 1985: 78-79.
- 212) Hartner 1965: 8.
- 213) Oppenheim 1949; Parpola 1985: 31-37.
- 214) Parpola 1985: 157.
- 215) Parpola 1985: 37-75.
- 216) Parpola 1985: 66-68.
- 217) The *Br̥had-Āraṇyaka-Upaniṣad* (1,4) has preserved another version of this myth, where the first animals created by Prajāpati and Vāc are the cow and the bull.
- 218) Weber 1862: II, 368-371.
- 219) Here we have the virgin of the unicorn legends. On *rohinī*, see Parpola 1998: 239-252.
- 220) Simson 1986: 216 and 223-224.
- 221) Possehl 1999: 175.
- 222) Grigson 1984: 168.
- 223) Grigson 1984: 168, with her emphasis.
- 224) Mackay 1931: II, 392.
- 225) Mackay 1938: I, 326 and note 1.
- 226) Parpola 1992 and the Indus script section of the crocodile paper in this book.
- 227) Mayrhofer 1992: I, 260.
- 228) Pokorny 1959: I, 303-304.
- 229) Pokorny 1959: I, 302.
- 230) AVŚ 4,4,7 *āhaṇ tanomi te paso adbi jyām iva dhanvani / kramasva rśa iva rohitam anavaglāyatā sadā*, translated by Whitney 1905: 151. The commentator takes *sadā* to

mean 'always', but, as Whitney notes, the word might be instrumental of *sad-* 'position in coitus' as suggested by Böhtlingk and Roth 1875: VII,603: "2. *sad-* ... 2. m. das Besteigen (des Weibchens) AV. 4,4,7". The verse is not found in the Paippalāda version of the Atharvaveda.

231) Molesworth 1857: 703c; Turner 1966: 628 no. 10865.

232) Turner 1966: 628 no. 10870.

233) Roberts 1977: 175-176.

234) Two species are combined in the genus name of the nilgai: *Bos-elaphus*, literally 'cow-deer' (although the nilgai is not a deer but an antelope).

235) Mackay 1931: II, 382.

236) Mackay 1931: II, 383.

237) Roberts 1977: 175-176.

238) Mackay 1931: II, 382.

239) Cf. Roberts 1977: 177a "They are believed to be much reduced in numbers in all these regions despite being regarded as sacred by most of the Hindu farming population." Krishna 2010: 48: "The nilgai or blue bull is actually a species of antelope, commonly seen all over north India. It looks like a cow, hence its name (nil means blue, gai means cow). The blue bull is regarded as a bovine animal, leading to the local belief that the nilgai is a cow and hence sacred. This has protected it from hunters."

240) Roberts 1977: 177a.

241) Krishna 2010: 48. "As a result of the reduction of the tiger population, the population of the nilgai has multiplied considerably."

242) Roberts 1977: 177b.

243) Krishna 2010: 48.

244) See the paper on the wild asses, section 5.

245) Ṛgveda 8,4,10a *ṛśyo na tṛṣyann avapānam ā gabi*.

246) Roberts 1977: 177b.

247) DEDR no. 1664.

248) Cf. DEDR no. 4780.

249) Cf. DEDR no. 1659.

250) Cf. DEDR no. 1651. Waterpot reminds one of water, one of the main issues in the Ṛśyaśṛṅga legend, which also contains the motif of 'pot birth' common in ancient Indian mythology. Ṛśyaśṛṅga was born when the nilgai

doe drank semen shed into a waterpot by his father.

251) Cf. DEDR no. 1654.

252) Cf. DEDR no. 1655.

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