

Unicorn Bull and Victory Parade

Asko Parpola

This paper complements an earlier more extensive study of the Harappan glyptic motif of 'unicorn' bull by considering a previously unnoticed Mesopotamian parallel and its implications for our understanding of the Harappan and later Indian religion. Conclusions: The 'unicorn' bull motif together with its religious symbolism and ritual use in the victory parade to gratify the goddess of war and fertility was adopted by the Indus people from Mesopotamia in Late Early Dynastic / Early Akkadian times. A minor modification was the symbolic and iconographic fusion of the Mesopotamian aurochs (not present in South Asia) with the local nilgay or 'blue bull'. From the Harappans this cultic package was adopted into the subsequent Vedic and Hindu religions; in Hinduism it has survived until our times.

Keywords: Indus, unicorn, parade/procession, victory, goddess.

Introduction

The 'unicorn bull' depicted on thousands of Indus seals is by far the most frequent iconographic motif of Harappan glyptics, and therefore clearly had great ideological importance for the Indus people. The problem of its interpretation has engaged also Mark Kenoyer, who published a longer paper entitled 'Iconography of the Indus unicorn: Origins and legacy' (2013). He concluded it as follows:

In conclusion, it is clear that the Indus unicorn of South Asia is one of the first depictions of a one horned animal, and that although the motif does not continue in the art and ideology of South Asia, it does appear in other adjacent regions at a later time. At present there is no direct connection between the Indus unicorn and those seen in later periods in West Asia, Europe, East Asia, and possibly Central Asia/Tibet, but this is certainly a topic that deserves considerable future research. It is also important to continue to explore the possibility that the image has its roots in the Early Harappan period, which is the source of many aspects of Indus urbanism.

In that paper, written for a meeting of the Society for American Archaeology held in 2009 in honor of Gregory

L. Possehl, Kenoyer has not taken into consideration my paper entitled 'The Harappan unicorn in Eurasian and South Asian perspectives', which was published in 2011 and reprinted in 2012. I am returning to this topic here, because there is now rather striking new material that clinches earlier hypotheses and develops them further. But before I take up this new evidence, I shall first summarize my principal arguments and conclusions, which differ from those of Kenoyer cited above. Readers interested in a fuller account and references should consult this long and detailed study with many illustrations from 2011, and also my 2015 book, where some points are summarized, others developed further.

Mesopotamian origin

In my opinion it is most likely that the motif of 'unicorn bull' was adopted by the Harappans from Mesopotamia, where it was represented on seals from the Late Uruk times (c. 3400-3100 BC) onwards (Figure 1). Several other West Asian motifs, among them the 'contest' of a hero with two felines, and the 'double-bun' hair style, and the 'victory pose', were also taken over by the Harappans in the Late Early Dynastic and Early Akkadian periods, roughly 2500-2300 BC (Parpola 2015: 220-235; for the 'victory pose', see Figure 5 below).

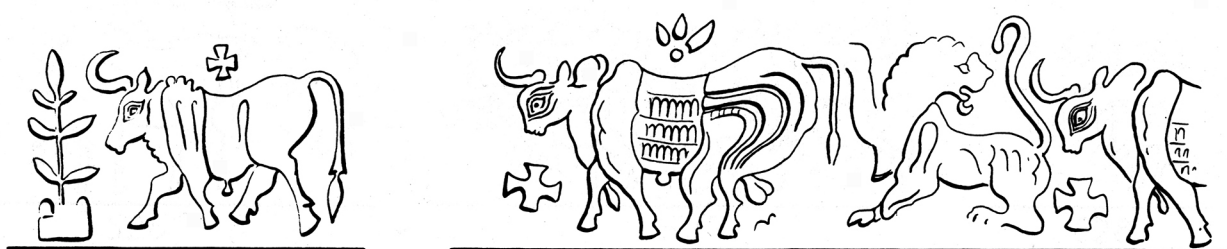


Figure 1. Impressions of two seals of the Proto-Elamite culture (c. 3200-2600 BC). 'Unicorn' wild bull, marked as Sky god with the attached 'star' symbol. Depicted testicles emphasize the bull's seminating power. For the fight between lion (symbolizing Goddess Earth) and bull, see Figures 3 and 4. (After Amiet 1980: nos. 514 and 515.)

Wild Bull – Seminating Father Sky with the single horn symbolizing a plow

In West Asia at large, since early Neolithic times, the wild bull symbolized the thundering Sky god (Figure 1), conceived to be the husband of Earth often represented by a cow or an image of a naked human female with large breasts and vulva. The ‘Bull of Heaven’ was understood to inseminate Earth with his fertilizing rain. The wild bull was often (but not always) depicted one-horned (Figure 1), probably for the same reason as the one-horned or one-tusked divinities in India: the single horn or tusk had phallic symbolism like the plow, which in early times was made of horn (Parpola 2011: 143–148).

Lion(ess) – Earth, Goddess of Love and War

Since at least 7000 BC, and all over West Asia, the Earth Goddess was associated with felines, especially the lion (see caption of Figure 3), a blood-thirsty beast, because she not only nourished her worshippers like a mother her children, but also fiercely defended them, killing enemies. The Goddess ruled over love and war, being associated with death also through her chthonic nature -- she received the dead in her womb.

Agriculture, fertility rites and mystery religion

In early agricultural communities, life depended on the growth of vegetation that culminated in harvest. Production of new corn depended upon reaping ripe corn and then burying seed corn, sacrificing part of the yield to the goddess in expectation of the seed’s rebirth. The fertility cult of Mother Earth with sexual rites developed into a mystery religion where living beings, especially seed-laying males, whether human or animal, were sacrificed to the Goddess, expecting their resurrection. The devotees partook of the life-containing blood and flesh of the victims. The main celebration of this cult took place at the ‘sacred marriage’ of the Goddess with her subsequently killed husband or lover, at the beginning of the new year that coincided with harvest time (Parpola 2015: 236–9; Vermaseren 1977).

Lion and Bull – Power symbols representing antithetic cosmic forces

The wild bull is a ferocious beast, an archetypal manifestation of virility and strength, and one of the principal symbols of royal power. In the Narmer palette of Predynastic Egypt, whose art goes back to Late Uruk Mesopotamia, the king is represented as a wild bull goring his enemies (Figure 2).

The lion, too, is a similar symbol of power and royalty. In Proto-Elamite seals (dating chiefly from the first

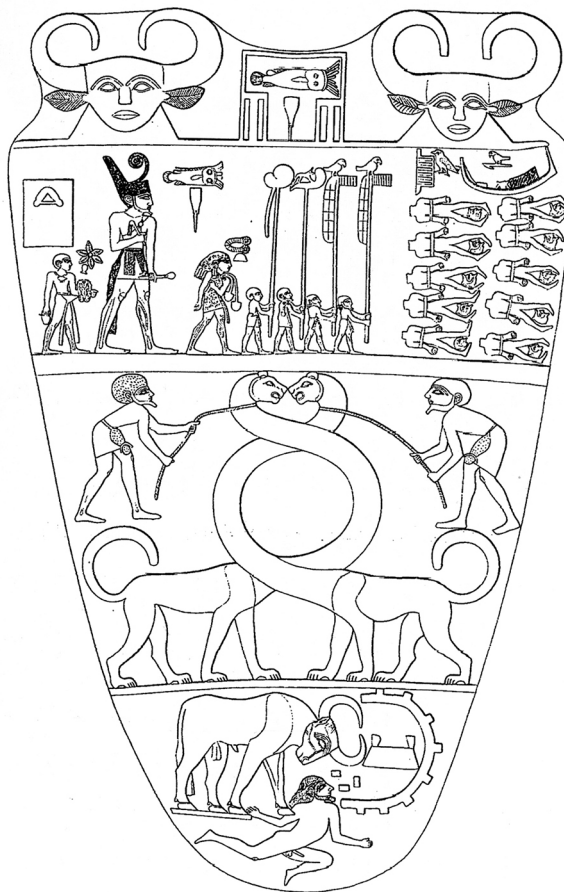


Figure 2. One side of the ‘Narmer palette’ of Pre-Dynastic Egypt. In the lowest register, the king as a wild bull is goring his adversary. In the second register, military standard-bearers with bound and decapitated prisoners. (After Grönblom 2000: 37).

quarter of the 3rd millennium BC), the combat between the lion and the bull is a repeated theme. The two animals are archetypal enemies in the nature, and in some seals they appear to personify opposite and complementary cosmic forces, which alternate in power. An enormous erect bull mastering seated lions is flanked by a large standing lion that dominates two small (unicorn) bulls (Figure 3). Another variant of the same theme is a standing lion that shoots a seated bull, flanked by a standing bull that clubs a seated lion (Figure 4). In these scenes, the lion represents the sun or day or summer or light, while the bull symbolizes the moon, night, winter or darkness, but undoubtedly also other dualistic forces, female and male, hot and cold, fire and water, life and death.

West Asian type ‘sacred marriage’ rites in South Asia

I have argued in detail (Parpola 2015: 173–186, 236–265) that this type of agricultural religion prevailed also in the

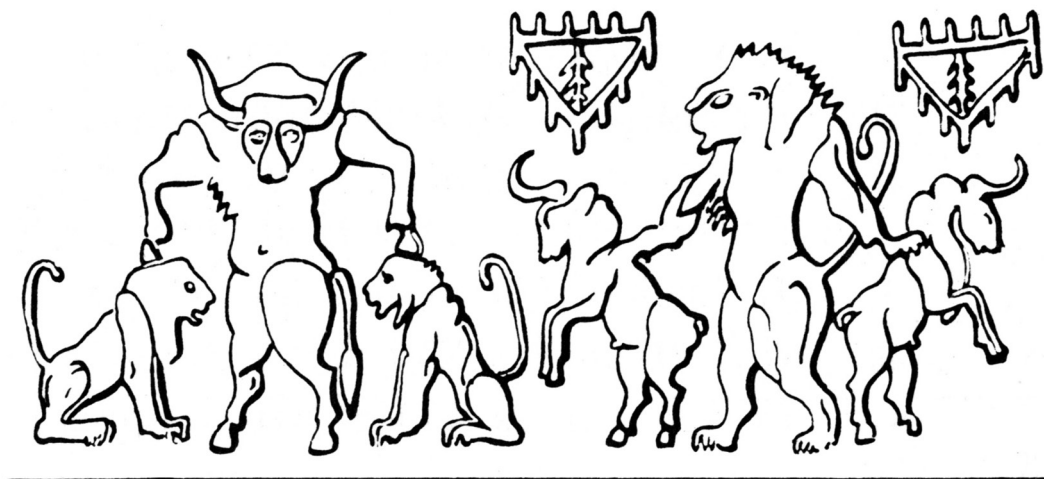


Figure 3. A Proto-Elamite seal impression from Susa, with lions and wild bulls dominating each other in turn. The script sign on either side of the standing lion denotes 'earth'. (After Amiet 1980: no. 585).

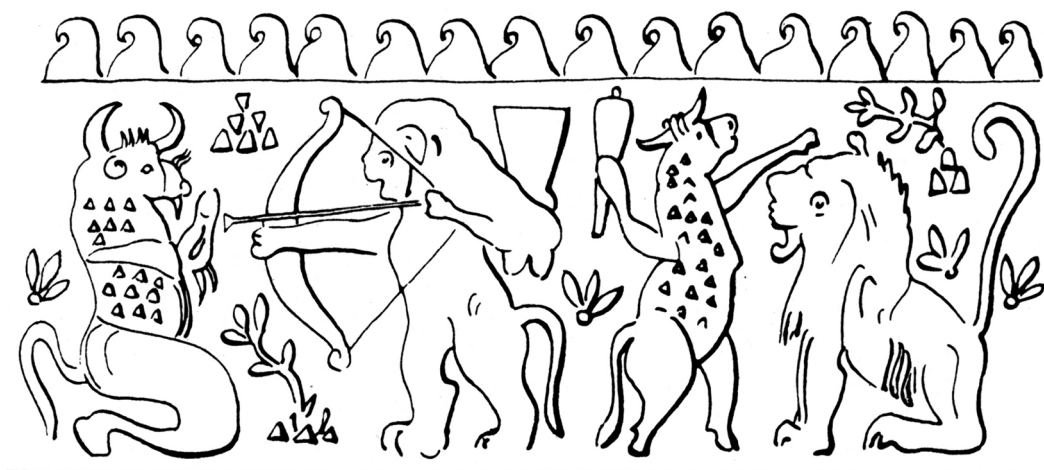


Figure 4. A Proto-Elamite seal in which an upright-standing lion shoots a seated bull and an upright-standing bull clubs a seated lion. (After Amiet 1980: no. 591).

Indus Civilization, and was passed on to the later Vedic and Hindu religions. A Harappan seal from Chanhu-daro represents the consummation of the 'sacred marriage': a bison bull is seen mating with a prostrate human female with widespread legs and vulva exposed. In the archaic horse and human sacrifices of the Veda, the principal male victim sleeps with the seniormost queen of the sacrificing king. From the Sanskrit title of the queen, *mahiṣī*, 'water buffalo cow', one may deduce that her husband was once titled *mahiṣa*, 'water buffalo bull'. The queen is also identified with the goddess *Vāc*, who is Earth and an 'invincible' deity symbolized by lioness. The lion- or tiger-riding Hindu Goddess *Durgā* has been worshipped with sacrifices of men, male buffaloes and other male animals. In the case of *Durgā*, the 'sacred marriage' theme is present in some Purāṇic variants of the myth, and in South Indian folk religion, where the

buffalo victim has been married to the village goddess before being put to death. A rock-panel carved c. 700 AD at Mamallapuram, South India, illustrating the fight between Goddess *Durgā* and the buffalo demon *Mahiṣa* Asura is strikingly similar to the Proto-Elamite seal illustrated in Figure 4, the lion-riding Goddess shooting arrows, and the buffalo bull wielding a club.

West Asian wild bull and South Asian wild buffalo

The symbolic correspondence between the wild bull of West Asia and the wild water buffalo of South Asia is proved by the royal 'contest' seals of Sargon the Great and his immediate successors, where the wild bull is suddenly replaced by the water buffalo (see Figure 5). This coincides with the arrival of boats from Meluhha to Akkad, the new capital of Sargon, which event is



Figure 5. The water buffalo in the place of the wild urus bull in Old Akkadian seals: a hero grappling with a water buffalo victoriously puts his foot on the head of the beast in a ‘contest’ scene on a seal from Mari. (After Parrot 1960: no. 224).

mentioned by Sargon himself. The boats presumably brought living wild water buffaloes as royal gifts to Sargon’s hunting park, for according to both osteological and pictorial evidence, this animal native to South Asia was not present in Mesopotamia before this and died out there soon afterwards (Boehmer 1975).

Harappan ‘Proto-Śiva’ in the light of later Indian divinities

I have not named the paragraphs of this long ‘chapter’ because it makes a whole that represents my current understanding. Most of the ideas presented here can be found in my book *The Roots of Hinduism* (2015), but some have been developed further.

The famous ‘Proto-Śiva’ depicted on a seal of Mohenjodaro wears the horns of a water-buffalo, and Alf Hiltebeitel (1978) has plausibly suggested that this deity should rather be called ‘Proto-Mahiṣa’. Indeed, Mahiṣa Asura as the adversary and husband of goddess Durgā undoubtedly descends from the Harappan buffalo-god. But Marshall’s old name may also stand, not only

because in some versions of the myth Śiva was reborn as Mahiṣa, but because in my opinion comparison with Mahiṣa does not exhaust the characteristics of the Harappan god. Hindu Śiva has many aspects.

On the basis of his connection with the buffalo (which has to bathe often) and with fish (which on some Indus objects are his attributes in the fashion of the Sumerian water god Ea/Enki) and crocodile, ‘Proto-Śiva’ was undoubtedly a god of water and fertility. In this respect he can be compared with the Vedic god Varuṇa, who survives in later Hinduism as water god. Fish and crocodile are in Hinduism also emblems of Kāma, the god of sexual love and desire, which are connected with Śiva in his phallic aspect so prominent in his *liṅga* icon.

Water does not exhaust the symbolic associations of the wild buffalo. Above all, it is one of the most dangerous beasts of South Asia, and therefore a paragon of a fearlessly charging mighty warrior, as characterized in Old Tamil poetics, and exemplified by Mahiṣa Asura. This destructive aspect makes buffalo the vehicle of the Hindu god of death, Yama. The buffalo has been largely eliminated from the Vedic religion, but on one occasion Varuṇa’s animal is the buffalo. Varuṇa is linked with Yama, the righteous judge, also by the noose with which Varuṇa grasps wrongdoers and punishes them. The dark colour of the buffalo further links the destructive beast with death and night. Mincing adversaries in its feet the dark buffalo veritably is Śiva Mahākāla, ‘the Great Black’, the god of death dancing at evening dusk.

The Sanskrit name of the wild buffalo, *mahiṣa*, means ‘great, majestic’, and has undoubtedly once been used as an important royal title, as *mahiṣī* (‘female buffalo’) as the title of the seniormost queen suggests. In the Veda, Varuṇa is above all the divine king, who majestically rules the universe. But Varuṇa is a deity brought to the Indus Valley by Indo-Aryan speakers during the first half of the 2nd millennium BC, after the Indus Civilization but before the Ṛgvedic Aryans arrived. According to my reconstruction (Parpola 2015: 107–116), Mitra and Varuṇa are later doubles of the Aśvins, divine twins, who came into being together with the horse-drawn chariot as the deified chariot team, representing a dual kingship: the king (*rājan*) was the chariot warrior, and the royal priest (*purohita*) the chariot driver. Their cosmic counterparts were the sun and the moon, or day and night. Varuṇa as *samrāj* or ‘co-king’ would originally have been the priest-king, associated with night.

The above sketched dual kingship (which also came to Greece with the Dorians worshipping Dioskouroi) probably differed from the Harappan concept of kingship. If Śaiva-Śākta Hinduism best reflects the Harappan heritage in later South Asian religious tradition, as I think, the Harappans may have operated

with the concepts of Old King versus Young King, or Ruler versus Crown prince (*yuvarāja*) (Heesterman 1990). The latter would survive in Old Tamil *Cēy* ‘the Red One’ alias Muruku ‘Youth’, in Vedic Rud(hi)ra ‘Red’ alias Kumāra ‘Youth’, and Hindu Skanda alias Kumāra (Parpola 2016). This ideal warrior, ‘eternally 16 years old’, would correspond to the rising and day sun, and is likely to have been represented by the tiger in Harappan glyptics. The Old King or Ruler would correspond to the setting and night sun and have two aspects. In his destructive and stern aspect, the King is Śiva Mahākāla, the Black god of death and nightly darkness, represented by the majestic Buffalo. In his creative and benign aspect, the King is Śiva Mahāyogi, his body white with the ashes smeared on it and full of semen accumulated with his asceticism like the cool white moon full of nectar. This side of the Ruler is symbolized by another animal majestically depicted on Indus seals, the white zebu bull, Śiva’s vehicle Nandi.

In the Indus Civilization, as in all archaic cultures, the sun has surely been one of the foremost symbols of kingship. In the Vedic royal consecration, the king follows the sun that in its daily and yearly round through space and time takes possession of the universe: the king ritually absorbs the four social classes by taking a step in the four directions symbolized by them and then transcends them by occupying the centre. In the ‘Proto-Śiva’ seal, the deity has four faces, looking from the centre to the four directions symbolized by the four animals represented in the seal. In this respect he is like the four-faced Hindu creator god Brahmā, who in architecture and iconography is connected with the centre. So is Śiva’s cosmic *liṅga*, the axis of the universe, which likewise is often provided with four faces. (Parpola 2015: 190–5, 231–5.) Indeed, I believe Brahmā, or his Vedic predecessor, the creator god Prajāpati, originally represents the benign fertility side of Śiva and the King, though by Vedic times Prajāpati represents the priestly class of Brahmins.

Indus unicorn – Cross of wild bull and nilgay antelope

While the humpless wild bull, auroch or urus (*Bos primigenius*), was still present in Mesopotamia at least until the 1st millennium BC, Ernest Mackay (1931: II, 382–3) and the archaeozoologist Caroline Grigson (1984) have proposed that this animal was not available as a living model for the Harappan artists in the Indus Valley. While other animals living in the Indus Valley have been represented very realistically, many features of the humpless wild bull have either become distorted in the process of copying older models or replaced by features of other species. Mackay indeed proposed that the Harappan ‘unicorn’ is ‘a composite of the ox and the antelope’. In my 2011 paper I have added some further features specific to the Indus ‘unicorn’ that fit perfectly

with those of the nilgay antelope, whose Hindi name literally means ‘blue bull’.

Nilgay bull and cow – The primeval couple

The primeval couple of Heaven and Earth, represented by the wild bull and the cow or lion in West Asia, has an early Indian counterpart in the Vedic creator god Prajāpati and his daughter Vāc, whose incestual union produces all living beings. Trying to escape the sexual advances of her father, Vāc successively assumes the female shape of various animal species, but time and again Prajāpati follows her and assuming the corresponding male shape copulates with Vāc. While this process is described at length in some Vedic texts, others abbreviate the story by mentioning just one animal couple. Significantly, this is the nilgay cow (*rohit*, ‘reddish’) and nilgay bull (*ṛśya*). In this creation myth, the creator god is punished for his sin and pierced with an arrow, and he is also identified with the sacrificial victim. The metamorphoses of the creator god Prajāpati are paralleled by the metamorphoses of Mahiṣa Asura, who as a fierce warrior is killed by Durgā in one human or animal shape after another (Parpola 1992). The Indus seals depicting mythical beasts that combine body parts of different animal species in one body to my mind reflect this conception that all male animals are ultimately manifestations of one single male deity, Prajāpati or Mahiṣa.

Nilgay bull and Ṛśyaśṛṅga, the unicorn sage with a single antelope horn

The connection of the Indus unicorn and Vedic Prajāpati with specifically the nilgay bull, *ṛśya*, is important also because it links them with the later Indian myth of Ṛśyaśṛṅga, known from the epics Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa, numerous Purāṇas and various Buddhist sources. A sage born from the union of a man and nilgay cow had on his forehead a single horn of the nilgay antelope. This sage lived alone in the forest and through his celibacy accumulated immense creative power for himself. The power was released when a king sent a woman to seduce the sage in order to produce rain after a long drought. Thus, the Indus ‘unicorn’ does in fact have a direct connection with the later South Asian myth of a ‘unicorn’ being.¹

Terracotta figurines of the Indus unicorn

Mark Kenoyer (2013) has pointed out that a number of terracotta figurines of a ‘unicorn’ bull, found at Chanhudaro and other sites, with their three-dimensional form confirm that the Harappans indeed conceived of

¹ I take this opportunity of rectifying one thing in my account of the Ṛśyaśṛṅga legend in Parpola 2011: 133–139. The stūpa relief illustrated in fig. 8 on page 135 has nothing to do with Ṛśyaśṛṅga; see Bhattacharya 1991.

the ‘unicorn’ as a one-horned animal, although this has long not been recognized. Another significant contribution of his is the following observation: ‘Many of the complete examples of terracotta unicorn figurines have a hole in the belly that may have been used to mount them on a stick to be carried in some form of ritual, or in a puppet show’ (Kenoyer 1998). There is one unique terracotta tablet from Mohenjo-daro that depicts a procession with a unicorn image carried on a high standard, as if it represented some deity or sacred emblem’.

Unicorn-standard carried in procession on tablets from Mohenjo-daro

There are in fact two such terracotta tablets from Mohenjo-daro, probably made with the same mould, which I reproduce here in the best available pictures (Figures 6a and 6b). They show four men, apparently kneeling (as in Harappan scenes of presenting an offering) and holding up poles topped by different things. In the centre is an image of the ‘unicorn’ bull (though the horn is not visible, the identity is clear from other features). The poles at either end, especially that in front, resemble the ‘offering stand’ usually placed in front of the unicorn on many Indus seals. Indeed, one unique tablet from Harappa shows this very ‘offering stand’ being held up by a man standing besides, tiny in relation to the stand (Figure 6c). The pole immediately in front of the bull looks like having some sort of flag or pennant.

Parallels in Egyptian military parades

Heinz Mode (1944: 57 and figs. 101–102) compared the scene of the Mohenjo-daro tablets to processions with standards seen on Egyptian monuments. In addition to the one illustrated by Mode one can refer to the Narmer palette of Predynastic Egypt (see Figure 2), which depicts a military parade with standard-bearers, while in front of them are bound and decapitated bodies of enemies taken as prisoners.

Important new parallel from the Ishtar temple of Mari in Mesopotamia

S. Kalyanaraman, a retired financial and IT executive of the Asian Development Bank and Indian Railways, now Director of his own private Saraswati Research Centre in Chennai, has been interested in the Indus script since the 1980s. In his recent books and many, now indeed daily blogs and emails, Kalyanaraman interprets Indus inscriptions as catalogues of metalwork, written in a Prakritic lingua franca, which contains the vocabulary of practically all languages of the Indian subcontinent. According to Kalyanaraman, the Harappans spread their metallurgical knowledge and culture from the Indus Valley to West, Central and East Asia. Kalyanaraman’s hypotheses make little sense to me, but his tireless search of the internet for possible links with the Indus Civilization has produced much interesting raw material that can be used without regard to his idiosyncratic views. In his e-mail message



Figure 6. a) A procession of four men holding up stands topped by various things including a ‘unicorn’ bull. Terracotta tablet M-490 (HR 1443) from Mohenjo-daro (photograph by Jyrki Lyytikkä; after Joshi and Parpola 1987: 120); b) Terracotta tablet M-491 (HR 1546) from Mohenjo-daro (photograph by Jyrki Lyytikkä; after Joshi and Parpola 1987: 120); c) a unique tablet H-196 (2262) from Harappa (photograph by the Archaeological Survey of India; after Joshi and Parpola 1987: 212).

of 10 July 2016, Kalyanaraman communicated the following really significant Mesopotamian parallel to the two procession tablets from Mohenjo-daro.

In the winter of 1933-34, André Parrot excavated the Ishtar temple of the city of Mari on the Euphrates in northern Mesopotamia. In the courtyard of the temple Parrot discovered remains of a mosaic panel that consisted of separate carved mother-of-pearl plates about 10 cm high. The panel (Figure 7), now in the Musée du Louvre in Paris (AO 19820), cannot be quite reliably reconstructed because it was completely mutilated and dispersed when the city was sacked, but its components make it possible to recognize in it a victory parade, with dignitaries in military uniform and weapons, bundled prisoners (an important component of other Mesopotamian victory parades, like that depicted on Sargon's stela from Susa), and most interesting in this connection, a unicorn bull carried at the top of a stand (Figure 8). The panel is dated to Late Early Dynastic Period, around 2500-2400 BC, the time when the Harappans probably took over unicorn and several other art motifs from Mesopotamia. (Parrot 1935: 130-137; 1956: 161).

Ishtar Gate of Babylon as the processional way of the new year festival

The famous Ishtar Gate of Babylon, built in the early 6th century BC and now reconstructed in the Vorderasiatisches Museum of Berlin, formed the

processional way of the new year festival. Its walls were covered with mosaics of coloured bricks, representing lions, unicorn bulls and dragons (Marzahn 1995). Inanna-Ishtar was the Mesopotamian Goddess of Love and War, whose 'sacred marriage' was celebrated at the new year festival. When we turn to consider the later Indian religions, it is important to note that the panel of the Ishtar temple of Mari with its bearer of the 'unicorn' standard represents a victory parade.

Military parade in the autumnal festival of the goddess Durgā

The nine days long *navarātri* festival celebrates Goddess Durgā's victory over the buffalo demon (and originally, as in the Vedic horse sacrifice and South Indian village rites, also the 'sacred marriage' of these two deities) in the autumn, originally. The festival ends with the 'tenth day of victory', when the king is supposed to have his army lustrated for the war expeditions, that traditionally started at this time when the roads had dried up after the rainy season and crops had been harvested and were ready for looting.

Preceded by the royal priest (*purohita*), who has performed the rites for starting a journey, the king marches with his army towards northeast (the direction of the first light which conquers darkness), to a *śamī* tree, the abode of the Invincible Goddess. After worshipping the goddess, the king shoots an arrow through the heart of an effigy representing his

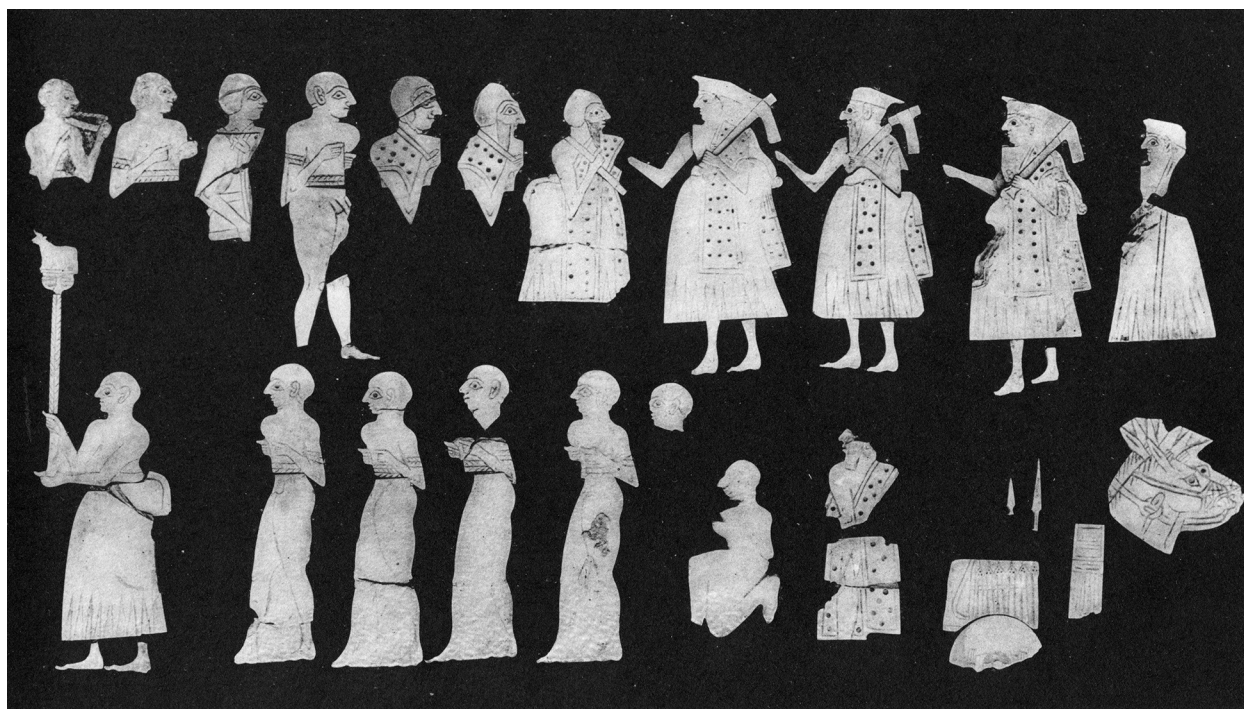


Figure 7. Parts of a destroyed victory parade schist panel inlaid with carved mother-of-pearl plaques, excavated in the courtyard of the Ishtar temple at Mari, northern Mesopotamia and dated to c. 2500-2400 BC. (After Parrot 1935: 28, fig. 2).

enemy. The purohita recites verses about the victory of the king in the four directions of space, and arranges sports of elephants, horses and foot-soldiers. Then the king returns to his palace to the accompaniment of auspicious shouts like *jaya!* ‘Victory!’ If a king starts on an invasion without celebrating the *vijayadaśamī* day in this fashion, he will not secure victory in war (Kane 1958: 190–191).

Vedic precursor of the Durgā cult’s victory parade

The Vedic precursor of the *vijayadaśamī*, the mahāvratā rite, was originally performed at the time of autumnal equinox. It comprized a ‘sacred marriage’ in the form of a sexual union of a celibate bard or student and a prostitute. The king and his companions were dressed in armor, they shot from their chariots arrows through targets, and proceeded away from the sacrificial place until they sighted cows that could be raided (Parpola 2015: 130–144; 249–254).

Processions in the Hindu religion

Processions are part of many Hindu festivals and belong to the characteristic features of the Hinduism, yet ‘the origin and earliest development of religious procession rituals in South Asia are unknown’ (Jacobsen 2009: 445). I propose that they have developed from the victory parade. The evidence discussed in this paper suggests that the custom of celebrating a victory parade at the new year festival of the goddess was adopted by Harappans from Mesopotamia and that this custom survived in the Vedic religion and is still continued in Hinduism. Until recently, many royal courts of India have arranged pompous victory parades on the *vijayadaśamī* day.

Temple processions in which large numbers of people take part form an important part of the temple cult especially in South India. Many of these processions are connected with the marriage of the divine couple worshipped in the temple, as in the case of the Goddess Mīnākṣī and God Sundareśvara in Madurai, southern Tamil Nadu. The temple legend of Mīnākṣī shows her to be an incarnation of Durgā: as a Pāṇḍya princess she was raised in martial arts and she conquered the whole world until she confronted her future husband in battle. In the procession the devotees pull huge temple cars carrying the images of the deities around their city, which becomes blessed through their presence (Harman 1989).

Temple processions with carried bull images in Kerala

The South Indian state of Kerala, separated from the rest of the subcontinent by mountain ranges, has preserved many archaic ritual traditions. It is

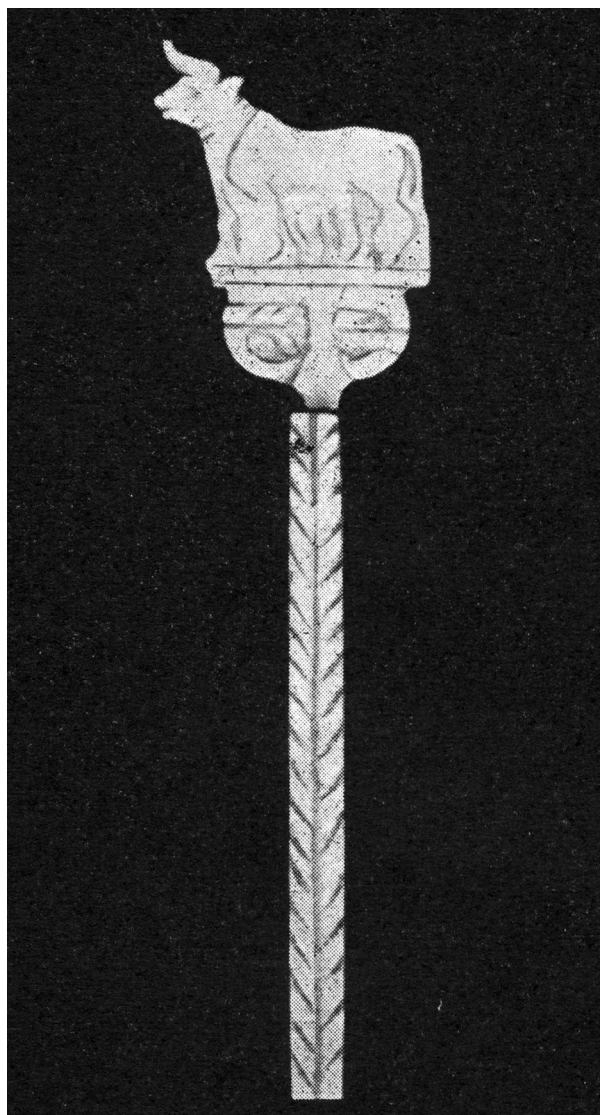


Figure 8. Detail of the Mari Ishtar temple victory parade: the stand topped by the image of unicorn wild bull (excavation no. M-458), height 7cm. (After Parrot 1935: 134, fig. 15).

interesting that some temple festivals there involve processions in which effigies of horses or bulls made of bamboo, hay and cloth are carried on palanquins or carts as offerings to the deity. This mode of worship is called in Malayalam *kālca* and in Tamil and Telugu *kāṭci*, corresponding to Sanskrit *darśana*. It provides to the deity a visual offering, and this can explain the kneeling pose of the standard-bearers on the Mohenjo-daro tablets depicting a procession (Figure 6). On the other hand, divine images carried in processions offer to the devotees an opportunity to experience the auspicious sight (*darśana*) of a divine manifestation. This mode of worship, like *pūjā* characteristic of Hinduism, is alien to the Vedic religion.

On the concluding day of the festival of Machattu Mamangam lasting five days in February, horse images



Figure 9. Bull image (*kāḷa-kōlam*) for the *vēla* festival of the Chelakkara Antimahākāḷan temple in 1975. (Photograph by Asko Parpola).

(in Malayalam *kutirakkōlam*) are carried by devotees on shoulder in grand procession as offerings to goddess Bhagavati at the Machattu Thiruvaniḱavu temple near Vadakkancherry in the Trichur district of Kerala. Each horse represents a village in the region and is offered to the goddess in order to receive blessings of prosperity to the village. As the horse belongs to the army and the recipient is the goddess, it is likely that this festival might have developed from a lustration parade of the army.

Personally, I have witnessed the preparation of a bull image (called in Malayalam *kāḷa-kōlam* or *eṭuppu kāḷan*) for the temple of Antimahākāḷan (Śiva dancing at dusk as Mahākāḷa) in Chelakkara, Trichur district, in 1975 (Figure 9). Most famous, however, are the bull processions of two Brahma temples in Kerala. Surrounding villages take bull images in procession as offerings to the Brahma temple in Oachira near Kollam in Kerala. Devotees pull temple cars each having a pair of bulls, the right one red, the left one white. In 2015

more than 150 big and small cars participated, and the crowds numbered more than 200,000 people. The festival takes place 28 days after the *ōṅam* festival in December-January and is said to be the *ōṅam* festival of cattle (The Hindu 2015). Temple cars similarly take huge images of bull pairs to the Brahma temple at Nooranad Padanilam about 60 km from Alappuzha in Kerala during the Mahāśivarātri (Mathew 2010).

God Brahma and the Puṣkar cattle fair

Brahma temples are rare in India, the most famous being at Lake Puṣkar ('lotus pond') in Rajasthan, the venue of a big cattle fair, which involves not only cows but also camels and other domestic animals. The temple history associates Puṣkar with Brahma's sacrifice, his marriage with the goddess Devasenā ('the divine army') that represents high castes, and goddess Gāyātri (Malik 1993) that represents the low caste pastoral people of Ābhīras. I cannot enlarge upon this theme but refer the reader to my extensive paper entitled 'Sāvitrī and resurrection' (Parpola 1998), which among many other things deals with Puṣkar's connection with the myth of the creator god Prajāpati's incestual 'marriage' with his daughter Vāc.

Here I would just like to refer to Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa (3,33–34), where this divine couple (Prajāpati and his daughter Vāc) appears in the shape of a nilgay bull (*rśya*) and nilgay cow (*rohit*). The gods made Rudra pierce Prajāpati with arrow in punishment for his incest. In reward, Rudra obtained the overlordship of cattle, 'therefore does his name [Paśupati] contain the word 'cattle'. Rich in cattle he becomes who knows thus this name of his'. After Rudra's shot, 'the seed of Prajāpati ran; it became a pond. The gods said: 'Let not this seed of Prajāpati be spoiled'. The gods surrounded the seed with fire and made many divinities come out of it. Finally, 'the extinguished coals became black cattle; the reddened earth ruddy (cattle). The ash which there was crept about in diverse forms, the buffalo, the gayal, the antelope, the camel, the ass, and these ruddy animals. To them this god [Rudra] said, 'Mine is this, mine is what remains'' (transl. Keith 1920: 185–6).

Could it be that in Vedic times a cattle fair took place in connection with the autumnal 'sacred marriage' at mahāvratā? In any case, large numbers of different animals have been sacrificed at the *vijayadaśamī* festival in honour of the Goddess of Victory, and their meat has been relished by the feasting participants of this śābarotsava (Parpola 2015: 251). Significantly, Ṛgvedic hymns speak of Indra's preparing for fight by eating hundreds of buffaloes. Clearly the Ṛgvedic Aryans initially imitated the 'victory' feast of their adversaries, but then consciously abstained from referring to the buffalo in their texts (Parpola 2015: 178, 253).

Bibliography

- Amiet, P. 1980. *La glyptique mesopotamienne archaïque* (Deuxième édition revue et corrigée avec un supplément). Paris, Éditions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique.
- Bhattacharya, G. 1991. The so-called Ṛṣyaśṛṅga. *South Asian Studies* 7: 141.
- Boehmer, R. M. 1975. Das Auftreten des Wasserbüffels in Mesopotamien in historischer Zeit und seine sumerische Bezeichnung. *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 64: 1–19.
- Grigson, C. 1984. Some thoughts on unicorns and other cattle depicted at Mohenjo-daro and Harappa. In B. Allchin (ed.), *South Asian Archaeology 1981* (University of Cambridge Oriental Publications, 34): 166–169. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Grönblom, R. 2000. *Faraonernas Egypten*. Helsingfors, Schildts.
- Harman, W. P. 1989. *The sacred marriage of a Hindu goddess* (Religion in Asia and Africa Series). Bloomington, Indiana University Press.
- Heesterman, J. C. 1990. King and warrior. In J. C. Galey (ed.), *Kingship and the kings. History and Anthropology* 4 (1): 97–122. London, Harwood Academic Publishers.
- Hiltebeitel, A. 1978. The Indus Valley 'Proto-Śiva', reexamined through reflections on the goddess, the buffalo, and the symbolism of vāhanas. *Anthropos* 73: 767–797.
- Jacobsen, K. A. 2009. Processions. In K. A. Jacobsen (ed.), *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism*, Vol. 1 (Handbook of Oriental Studies, Section two: India, vol. 221): 445–453. Leiden, Brill.
- Joshi, J. P. and Parpola, A. 1987. *Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions, Volume 1. Collections in India* (Annales Academiae Scientiarum Fennicae, Ser. B239; Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India, Vol. 86). Helsinki, Suomalainen tiedeakatemia.
- Kane, P. V. 1958. *History of Dharmasāstra*, Vol. V, 1 (Government Oriental Series, Class B, no. 6). Poona, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
- Keith, A. B. 1920. *Rigveda Brahmanas. The Aitareya and Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇas of the Rigveda, translated from the original Sanskrit* (Harvard Oriental Series, 25). Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press.
- Kenoyer, J. M. 1998. *Ancient cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*. Karachi, Oxford University Press.
- Kenoyer, J. M. 2013. Iconography of the Indus unicorn: Origins and legacy. In S. A. Abraham, P. Gullapalli, T. P. Raczek and U. Z. Rizvi (eds), *Connections and Complexity. New approaches to the archaeology of South Asia*: 107–125. Walnut Creek, Left Coast Press.
- Mackay, E. J. H. 1931. Seals, seal impressions, and copper tablets, with tabulation. In J. Marshall (ed.), *Mohenjo-daro and the Indus Civilization. Being an official account of archaeological excavations at Mohenjo-Daro carried out by the government of India between the years 1922 and 1927*, Vol. 2: 370–405. London, Arthur Probsthain.
- Malik, A. 1993. *Das Puṣkara-Māhātmya: Ein religionswissenschaftlicher Beitrag zum Wallfahrtsbegriff in Indien. Erörterung, Text, Übersetzung* (Beiträge zur Südasienforschung, 155). Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag.
- Marzahn, J. 1995. *The Ishtar Gate. The processional way of the new year festival of Babylon*. Berlin, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Vorderasiatisches Museum.
- Mathew, D. M. 2010. Kettukazha season begins. *The Hindu* (13 February 2010).
- Mode, H. 1944. *Indische Frühkulturen und ihre Beziehungen zum Westen*. Basel, Benno Schwabe and Co.
- Parpola, A. 1992. The metamorphoses of Mahiṣa Asura and Prajāpati. In A. W. van den Hoek et al. (eds), *Ritual, state and history in South Asia. Essays in honour of J. C. Heesterman* (Memoirs of the Kern Institute, 5): 275–308. Leiden, E. J. Brill.
- Parpola, A. 1998. Sāvitrī and resurrection. In A. Parpola and S. Tenhunen (eds), *Changing patterns of family and kinship in South Asia* (Studia Orientalia 84): 167–312. Helsinki, The Finnish Oriental Society.
- Parpola, A. 2011. The Harappan unicorn in Eurasian and South Asian perspectives. In T. Osada and H. Endo (eds), *Linguistics, archaeology and the human past* (Occasional Paper 12): 125–188. Kyoto, Research Institute for Humanity and Nature.
- Parpola, A. 2015. *The Roots of Hinduism. The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization*. New York, Oxford University Press.
- Parpola, A. 2016. Rudra: 'Red' and 'Cry' in the name of the Young God of Fire, Rising Sun, and War. In D. Gunkel et al. (eds), *Sahasram ati srajas. Indo-Iranian and Indo-European studies in honor of Stephanie W. Jamison*: 322–332. Ann Arbor, Beech Stave Press.
- Parrot, A. 1935. Les fouilles de Mari. Première campagne (hiver 1933-34), rapport préliminaire. *Syria* 16: 117–140.
- Parrot, A. 1956. *Mission archéologique de Mari, tome I. Le temple d'Ishtar* (Bibliothèque archéologique et historique, 65). Paris, Librairie orientaliste P. Geuthner.
- Parrot, A. 1960. *Sumer* (The arts of mankind, 1). London, Thames and Hudson.
- The Hindu 2015. Thousands witness Eduppu Kala. *The Hindu* (25 September 2015). URL: <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/kerala/thousands-witness-eduppu-kaala/article7687863.ece>
- Vermaseren, M. J. 1977. *Cybele and Attis. The myth and the cult*. London, Thames and Hudson.