

The Representation of the Donkey in Ancient Iraq

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Abstract

The donkey is a mammal animal which has been mentioned in the Sumerian and Akkadian cuneiform writings. The ancient Iraqi people used donkeys for riding and carrying heavy loads, as well as in agriculture and plowing. The positive characteristics of the donkey made it domesticated and used widely by most families who used to possess at least one or more donkeys.

The donkey was probably domesticated long before the horse and was descended from the wild ass called the onager. The domesticated donkey appeared in artistic forms for the first time in the Ubaid era, where clay samples representing a donkey were found and donkey representations were widely seen on cylindric seals during the Uruk and Jemdat Nasr eras.

Key words: donkey, onager, ancient Iraq, transport animal, plowing animal, tributes, shepherd.

Introduction

The donkey represents a distinguished animal sample for its many uses due to its positive characteristics, which make it possible for ancient people to domesticate and make use of in everyday life. The present study aims to shed light on the significance of this animal in the economic situation of ancient people in their daily lives due to its many uses such as transport, riding, and plowing. The use of the donkey in trading dated back to the third millennium BC and was consolidated in the second and first millennium BC. The name of the donkey was mentioned in ancient legal documents, as in Article 269 of Hammurabi Law and Article 10 of Eshnunna Law, which proves the importance of the donkey in ancient Iraq.

Aims and Importance of the Study

Aims of the study are clearly demonstrated in finding answers to the following questions:

1. Did ancient Iraqis know about the donkey?

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2. Was the donkey domesticated in an early period of ancient Iraq?
3. Was the donkey used for different purposes?
4. What were the bodily features of the donkey?
5. Was the donkey mentioned in ancient Iraqi legal or economic texts?

Hypotheses of the Study

The researcher seeks to present a clear vision about the role of the donkey in the social life of ancient Iraqi people and provide a proof of its use for their livelihood, based on archeological evidence. The study also provides evidence for the domestication of the donkey since the Sumerian and Akkadian periods, thereby proving the hypothesis that it was used in trading, transport and plowing.

Nomenclature

The distinguished sign of the donkey in Uruk pictographs is () [1,p.1), whereas in Sumerian cuneiform scripts it is written as ANŠE, and in the Akkadian it is written as imêru [2,p.110). A female donkey is known as EME ANŠE in Sumerian, while it is atanu in Akkadian [3, p. 26]. Furthermore, a little donkey is called DÜR ANŠE in Sumerian and mūri in Akkadian [4, pp. 175-179].

Through studying cuneiform texts, it can be seen that other names are used to refer to the donkey based on its load and different uses. A type of riding donkey which is called agalu in Akkadian and ANSE – U in Sumerian [5, p141.] It is also mentioned in the texts of the third dynasty of Ur as ANSE. LIBIR, a type that is commonly seen in scenes and is used in the city of Mari during the Old Babylonian period. [3,p.71]

Donkeys are also given other names based on the type of work assigned to them. Thus, there are donkeys for drawing carts, pulling plows and carrying cargos. Additionally, names are found in texts bearing the description of the donkey according to color, such as the white donkey, which is widely used in various ancient Iraq areas, while the black donkey is brought from neighboring regions [3,pp.71-74]. As for the onager, it is mentioned in a number of texts and was referred to in dictionaries as DUR in Sumerian, and its Akkadian synonym is akkannu [5,p.274].

Characteristics

It is most likely that the positive qualities of the donkey have rendered it a common animal in ancient Iraq, as compared to other domestic animals. Most families use it and often own at least one or more donkeys. The most important characteristic is its ability to get by on a less demanding diet [6, p. 549] of food compared to the amount of

work it does; grass and hay suffice to meet its needs. The donkey does not necessarily feed on grains that humans eat such as barley and wheat. It does not pose a burden in terms of feeding [6,p.549]. The donkey is also resistant to diseases and less prone to wounds, and works hard until the age of forty years. When compared to the horse, the donkey is one of the animals that bears hardships [7, 49].

Cuneiform texts mention that the donkey can carry heavy loads that exceed (80) mana of different minerals, i.e. up to (90) kg. With this load, the donkey walks six hours a day, which is equivalent to 15 miles per day [8,p. 72.]. The domestic donkey is a relatively intelligent animal, unlike the commonly known idea of it nowadays [6, p.549.]. Received texts indicate that the ancient Iraqi was fairer and more equitable in describing the donkey and its capabilities. The name of the donkey came in the epithets of the gods Ninurta and Enlil; even more, the kings called themselves by its name, such as King Shulki (2095-2048 BC) BC [9,p.161.]. Also, the name of the donkey appears in personal names from the Akkadian era [2,p.112.].

Domestication

Due to the importance of the donkey in the ancient world, it was domesticated long before the domestication of horses, and the origin of the now-known domesticated donkey is not descended from the equine wild ass called the onager, as some researchers believe, but rather from the wild donkey *Equus asinus*. Both types are completely genetically different and the wild donkey used to live in semi-arid areas, as well as mountainous areas in North and South Africa in Sudan, the coasts of the Red Sea, Nubia, Abyssinia and Somalia. Hybridization were then took place between these types and from these hybrids the domestic donkey resulted. Later, domestication occurred in North and South Africa, the Arabian Peninsula and Iraq [6,p.549.].

It appears that the onager was used before the domesticated donkey. It was one of the animals that was well known in ancient times, but it became extinct after that [10, p. 581]. It was known in ancient Iraq since the stone ages. Its bones were found for the first time at the site of Jarmo (east of the city of Kirkuk), which dates back to about 7000 BC [11, p.47.] The onager also appears on the murals in the village of Um al-Dabbaghiyah during the age of Hasuna (5600-3500 BC). The onager was one of the animals that ancient people preferred to hunt and use as a means of transport [12, pp.3-10].

As for the domesticated donkey, it appeared for the first time in the form of artistic forms dating back to the Ubaid era. Clay artifacts representing the donkey were found. Additionally, many donkey representations were found in abundance on cylinder seals from the

Uruk era and Jamdet Nasr that were found in the city of Ur. This shows that this animal had been used as a means of transport since early times for pulling carts and plowing [13, pp.10-11.]. From the era of the early second dynasties (2800-2600 BC), the representations of donkeys appeared on the artistic drawings and as small dolls. A bridle ring was found on a figurine of a donkey from this era. Some researchers believe that this animal represents the onager [14,p.120.]

Uses

The donkey was one of the most important animals used for work and transport at that time in various regions of ancient Iraq [15, p.102.]. Archaeological evidence found on expressions on seals from Uruk era and seals of Jamdet Nasr found in Legash indicate that the donkey was initially used as an animal for carrying loads and pulling chariots, which often reflected religious rituals. It was not widely used for riding as it is found in the following eras. These religious rituals continued to appear in seals expressions in the royal cemetery of Ur [16, p.35]. These representations are few and do not fit with the important role of this animal in that period. Furthermore, the donkey was not very familiar in the evidence related to bones that were found in archaeological excavations [8, p.12.], but the names of donkeys and the works that they did were mentioned in the third dynasty of Ur [16, pp.172-174.].

Donkeys have been used extensively as a means of internal and external transportation [16, p.175.], as they carry various commercial materials and metals such as lead, copper, and tin, as well as stones used in construction, and products like grains and fruits [18, p. 216.] as well as oils, wool, and honey [18, p.216.]. This cheap and convenient means made it possible for easy transportation of commercial products by land and over long distances on various terrains of ancient Iraq, especially in the mountainous, undulating and desert areas due to the nature of the mentioned areas and lack of river courses in these areas. Most texts indicate that each commercial convoy consisted of about (50-100) donkeys [19,p.115,134.] in the Sumerian and Akkadian times [20,p.34.]. Texts mention exactly what these consist of goods and animals, as well as their bridles, saddles, and fodder [21, p.76.].

The earliest texts where donkeys were used for commercial transport dates back to the third millennium BC. Although researchers were not able to read the entire text due to some difficulties in understanding it, there was a description of preparing and sending out caravan of donkeys carrying sacks of barley in a city in Sumer to a place in the high lands of Logistan located in the country of Elam. The circumstances of this commercial journey and some social matters that occurred in have been referred to [22,p.315.]

In the Akkadian era (2371 - 2230 BC), each commercial convoy included a relatively large number of donkeys [23, p. 67-68]. The number of donkeys in one convoy sometimes reached 200 donkeys. Akkadian traders were buying donkeys from Assyria while passing through it [24, p.192.]. When arriving at the commercial centers in minor Asia Minor, the merchants would sell a large number of donkeys, making they were making high profits of them and covering cost related to the fodder and food of attendants. Related texts indicate that carts were used for carrying heavy loads and boats for crossing rivers. Goods were placed in dual packages on the backs of donkeys to offset them on both sides. On top of these packages, bags of smaller size were placed, perhaps for carrying precious metals such as gold and silver. Fabrics of 20-30 pieces for each load (about 80kg) were put in sacks and placed on donkey backs. [24, p.192.]. During the third dynasty of Ur (2112 - 2004 BC), it seems that commercial convoys used donkeys as a means of transport. According to excavated cuneiform texts from Mari, a number of donkeys were paid as tributes to the cities of Sumer. [25, p.314-315.].

Donkeys played an important role in the foreign trade movement since the ancient Assyrian era (2000-1521 BC). Texts from the city of Ganesh (Kultepe)* [26, p.121.] and the city of Mari (Tell al-Hariri) refer to huge quantities of goods imported and exported until the number of donkeys used in one trade reached to more than (200) donkeys [27, p 134]. One Assyrian convoy transported more than eleven tons of tin from Assyria to Anatolia, [28, p.223.]; the total load of a donkey was estimated at about (i.e. 100 kg).

The cheap means of transportation of using donkeys supported the national income of the Assyrian economy, both in regards with goods loaded on their backs, or with fees and other taxes. The economic benefit was not limited to this extent, but the Assyrian traders sold donkeys after emptying their loads in the Anatolian cities and that the topography of the terrain of those cities reflects the need to use Donkeys and mules for carrying goods such as copper metal. This was reflected in the high prices of donkeys, especially that reproduction of mules was an expensive process compared to donkeys [31,p.223.]. Mari's Archive and references from the ancient Assyrian period refer that the average price of a donkey in general was about 20 shekels of silver** [32, p. 47.], and at a lower price of 5.5 shekels of silver.[21,p.78.]

Donkeys were used in internal transportation and they continued to be used as a means of transportation and carrying. They were used to draw small carts[33, p.277], carrying loads, plowing and carrying waste resulting from drilling wells and dredging rivers. The old Iraqi laws

identified the fare of the donkey. For example, Article 10 of the Eshnunna Law specified the fare of a donkey:

"The hire of a donkey is 1 seah of barley, and the wages of its driver are 1 seah of barley. He shall drive it the whole day." [34, p. 164]

In the Law of Hammurabi, Article (269) identified that wages for hiring a donkey to be used for treading with 10 qa [35, p.38] of grains [36, p.93]. It is seen that the wages for hiring a donkey is almost the same in Eshnunna Law and Hammurabi Law [35, p97].

Perhaps the reason for the stability of wages for the use of donkeys is due to their scarcity in the Diyala region and their abundance in Babylon at the time [97, p.98.]. Articles (244-249) of Hammurabi's Law discuss liability for damages to rented animals. According to Article 244, if a person rents an ox or a donkey and killed by "a lion" in the field, the owner of the animal will be accountable for its death, not the lessee. Article No. 245 states that if the death of the animal is resulted from the lessee's neglect or beating of the animal, he shall be accountable for the damage, and he must compensate the owner of the animal with a similar one [37, p.437-438.]. In the Middle Assyrian laws, Article 5/Tablet 3 refers to the theft and sale of animals. If a man steals an ox, a donkey, a horse, or another animal that does not belong to him from the pasture and sells it to another man at a normal price and the buyer pays the normal price without knowing that it was stolen, the seller compensates the stolen goods [38,p.292-293.].

In the ancient Babylonian era (2000-1600 BC), donkeys were of great importance in conveying the correspondence of kings and princes, which indicates the advantages of this animal, and is understood from the content of a letter sent by Ashmi-Dakan to his brother, Adad, expressing his need for a number of donkeys:

"Bring me a number of donkeys from the high land of Andriq (northeastern Mesopotamia), and the land of Kharbi. Now, gather for me and send out a number of strong donkeys." [21,p.77-78.]

There are many texts that mention the use of donkeys, especially in the letters of Assyrian kings and rulers. From the ancient Assyrian era (2000-1500 BC), there is a crisis between Shamshi-Adad and his son Yasmah-Adad about the delay in the arrival of one of the ambassadors due to a broken wheel of the cart that was carrying him. Shamshi Adad indignantly asked his son, "Would he not be able to ride a donkey" [22, p.265.]. This indicates that ambassadors and messengers used donkeys for their internal and external movements by attaching carts to them or by riding on their backs. Cuneiform texts refer to the use of saddled donkeys for riding. The name of saddled donkey in Sumerian was ANŠE.NIG.LA and in Akkadian i-me- ri si - mit - tu, [4, p.172-173.] The donkey rider was called rakib ANSE.HI.A. Donkeys were also the

means of transporting messengers and envoys, as mentioned in the following text:

"The messenger riding the donkey will arrive." [2,p.110].

Furthermore, another message provides some information about the means that messengers used in their travels and the postal stations that delivered animals; it says:

"The animal which I had at my disposal has been decimated, and the king, my lord, knows that there is no stable (postal station) in Shapershaw, and that the animals that go do not return. My animals are exhausted, and there are draft donkeys available in Kalakh...a cart...my group of animals and the chariot driver. ". [39,pp.99-100.]

Donkeys were also part of the royal transportation system in the first millennium BC. Even after the appearance of horses, texts referred to this as ANSE rukūb Šarri, meaning: (a donkey for the king to ride). [4, pp.774-775.] The role of donkeys in the road transport did not disappear with the use of horses for transport, as it was cited in the following text:

"I gave him horses and donkeys for his journey." [2,p.113.]

Several references were made regarding donkeys in the modern Assyrian era in the form of taken spoils or impose tributes on rebellious nations. In the Annals of King Tawaklti Nurta II (890-884 BC), donkeys were among the spoils he took.

The peoples living along the middle and upper Euphrates up to "Khandano" were giving gifts such as camels and donkeys to the Assyrian. One of the texts mentioned of presenting "30 camels, 50 sheep and 30 donkeys to the Assyrians" [41, p.130.]. In the annals of King Tawaklti Ninurta II on his journey towards the upper Euphrates, we find the following text:

"While I was in Syracuse, I got tributes from Harani: 3 mina of gold, 10 in silver, 30 (?) copper, 6 gallons of lead, and 20 donkeys." [41,p.131.]

Assyrian letters mention that there are donkeys among the tributes and taxes as revenues for the Assyrian government. In a letter to King Sargon II (721-705 BC), the king is told by one of his attendants that messengers had brought the tributes that included one mule and three donkeys [39, p.9].

The Annals of the Assyrian King Sennacherib (704-681 BC) state that when he entered the city of Babylon to eliminate the rebel gatherings of the Chaldeans and the Arameans, he was able to obtain their countless possessions of horses, mules, donkeys, cows and sheep" [42, p.116.]. Furthermore, the Annals of King Ashur-Banipal

I (668 - 627 BC) mention that the Aramaic "Kambulu" tribe was constantly hostile to Assyrian king, so he sent a military campaign against them, during which he was able to take several types of animals, including "cows, sheep, donkeys, horses and mules", which he brought to the city of Ashur. [42,p.300.]

From the reign of King Ashurbanipal, a two-feet artifact of carved alabaster stone was also found from the Ashurbanipal Palace in Nineveh. A representation of donkeys were carved on it [43, p.102].

The donkey used to have an economic importance in the internal economy of ancient Iraq, represented by a number of units of weight: (a donkey's load of raw magnesium (metal) [2,p.114.]. It was also used as a unit of measure for liquid and dry materials: (a load of ten donkeys of wine). [2,p.114.] In another text: (a load of a thousand donkeys of barley as food). [2,p.114.] It was also used as a unit of area measurement (1 homer donkey [area] of the field) [2,p.114.]. Cuneiform texts also indicate that the donkey was bartered for other goods and was given instead of other good, such as barley. Texts also indicated that donkeys were given as a dowry to a bride or her child, as well as in exchange for breaking the slave's captivity [44,p.76.].

Cuneiform texts did not refer to the use of domestic donkeys for food; rather, their skins were used after their death in leather industries [p.549.] The name KUŠ ANŠE. RI. RI. denotes to the skin of a dead donkey [45, p.123-126] and their carcasses were used as a food for dogs [29,p.240.] The donkeys were only slaughtered symbolically at the conclusion of peace treaties between antagonists. The slaughtering of donkey indicates the conclusion of international agreements. In one of the letters addressed to King Zimri Lim (1779-1761 BC) by one of his officials regarding this practice states:

"Pina-Ishtar answered the following: I killed a donkey." [46, p.46.].

Additionally, the profession of a shepherd was not limited to herding a specific type of animal; the donkey shepherd SIPA.ANŠE appears in the cuneiform texts with more than one name, as the division of these shepherds depends on the type of work the animal performs as well as its gender. For example, SIPA.ANŠE.BIR is given to the donkey who pulls carts, while SIPA.EME is given to the shepherd of a donkey (female donkey) (6) [8,p.72.].

The donkey also had a military importance since they were used in army formation in ancient history. On the Standard of Ur, which was found among the contents of the royal Cemetery of Ur, an artistic representation of a number of donkeys were found. The animals were pulling carts and the scene portrays a festival of victory and bringing of spoils pulled by donkeys [47,p.37]. The donkey was used in the formations of the Assyrian army. It is well known that the Assyrians

launched many campaigns in the northeastern and west eastern regions, as well as south minor Asia.

Terrains of these areas were difficult to cross but easy for donkeys to navigate. The texts referred to a type of carts drawn by donkeys as ANŠE giŠ GI GIR and in Akkadian nar-kab-tu4. [48, p.51.] The role of donkeys in armies was to carry food and supplies for the army. It is to be noted that campaigns may take several days in the march, and huge numbers of donkeys were prepared for this purpose. Donkeys were also used for bringing spoils after victory, and kings' directives in this regard mention the following:

"Let them prepare a list of the total number of donkey to be used by the army." [2, p.115.].

Fodder was provided by the cities and regions of the Assyrian state or with which treaties were made [18, p.329]. The use of donkeys of pulling carts carrying food and supplies continued until the introduction of horses in large numbers. The use of donkeys in army formations continued until the Gregorian era, and the British army still keeps donkeys in one of its formations at the present time. [47, p.12.]

Conclusions

1. People of ancient Iraq used donkeys on a large scale for riding, and they were considered one of the main royal means of communication, especially at the beginning of the second millennium BC. They were also used for commercial purposes and transporting goods as they were used for commercial transport.

2. Due to the importance of the donkey and its uses, it occupied an important position in Assyria, as evidenced by the economic texts and trade letters found at the Kol-Taba site, which refers to the many donkey convoys of goods loaded with tin metal and textiles from Assyria to Anatolia. Those goods are sold in Anatolia in exchange for silver and sometimes gold.

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