

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CAPRA HIRCUS, THE DOMESTIC GOAT

13.1 THE LIVING ANIMAL

13.1.1 *Zoology*

The domestic goat (fig. 191) is related to the wild goats, and as such shares many features with them. These are the upright held tail, the beard below the chin in the males and often also in the females, the horns borne by both sexes, and the amazing climbing abilities. They not only climb steep rocks, but also thorny trees to eat the leaves that would otherwise be out of range.

Domestic goats show a large range of different colours, colour pattern, size, horn shape and horn size. They are on average smaller in size than wild goats, have a much less stocky build, shorter horns, and very often pendulous ears (fig. 192). Though the horns vary greatly among the various breeds, they always sweep upwards and then, if long enough, backwards in a scimitar form—ibex-like—, or sideward, away from the head, with a tendency to form a very loose open spiral—markhor-like—, or with a tendency to form knobs—bezoar-goat-like—. There is always a more or less well-developed keel on the anterior edge of the horn. Hornlessness occurs, but is not very common. The hairs can be very long (Plate 11) and the amount of free hanging hairs below the neck can be as substantial as in markhors.

Domestic goats are by definition found in association with humans (Plate 11). They can be kept at much more barren and cold environments than sheep. Goats are principally browsers, contrarily to sheep, which are grazers.

13.1.2 *Role of Goats in Society*

Goats were, along with sheep and possibly dogs, the first domesticated animals, and form until today an important part of the livestock of humans worldwide. Goats were and are primarily used for their meat and milk. Other useful products are bones, sinews, skins, horns and

dung; the bladder and stomach can be used as a bag. Their use as draught or riding animal is much more limited, especially since the beginning of the twentieth century.

Goats are extremely hardy and can thrive on minimal food quantity and quality and under extremes of temperature and aridity. Goats are mainly found in the arid and semi-arid zones, where vegetation is limited. The fact that goats are browsers and sheep grazers, explains why they are herded so often together. The sheep eat the grasses while the goats browse the thorny scrubs. The browsing of goats of freshly cleared land after the primary forest was burnt or cut down certainly helped the early farmers to improve the land, but at the same time lies at the basis of extensive desert-forming.

Goats were given as burial gift during the Harappa period (2,350–1,750 B.C.E.) in the Indus Valley as evidenced by the graves from Lothal in Gujarat¹ and a grave from the H-site at Harappa (fig. 8). The underlying reason is unknown, because the script of this ancient civilization is still insufficiently deciphered.

Together with sheep, goats are the favourite sacrificial animals in Hinduism, possibly based upon their prolific nature.² They are the most common sacrificial animals till the present day (fig. 15). In the brahmanical hierarchy of animals, the male goat comes after the ram.³ The goat is somehow ritually related to the mythical *sharabha*: at the sacrifice of the goat, the sacrificial quality (*medha*) passes out and the goat becomes a *sharabha*.⁴

The role of goats in religion apart from the animal sacrifice is limited. Strange enough, no major Indian deity seems to ride a goat as the northern European Thor does;⁵ the chariot of the Vedic god Pushan is, though, pulled by goats. The Rajasthani folk-goddess Meladi rides a black goat. A goat-headed deity is the Jain god Naigamesha, the patron of children.⁶ The association of Naigamesha with the goat might be based upon the same proverbial fertility as is the case

¹ Halim, op. cit. (1987), 213.

² See further section 32.1.3.

³ *ShB* 6.2.1.18, cited from Smith and Doniger, op. cit. (1989), 189–224.

⁴ *AiB* 2.8. This makes the *sharabha* unfit for sacrifice, because it has no sacrificial quality. See further section 43.2.2.

⁵ R. Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1993).

⁶ At Indra's command, Naigamesha transferred the embryo of Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, from the womb of Devananda, a woman of the priestly class, to that of Trishala, a woman of the ruling class.

with the Greek satyr Pan. Another goat-headed mythological figure is Daksha, father of Sati, Shiva's first wife. Once, Daksha did not invite Shiva, his son-in-law, to attend his sacrifice. Enraged, Shiva destroyed the sacrifice in the form of Virabhadra and beheaded Daksha. Upon Vishnu's intervention, Shiva placed a goat's head on Daksha's headless neck and restored life to him.

13.2 GOATS IN STONE

13.2.1 *Early Evidence*

One of earliest stone sculptures of a goat is part of a decorative frieze from northern India (second century B.C.E.).⁷ It is a very naturalistic and at the same time appealing depiction of a male domestic goat, walking in procession behind a zebu. The goat walks proudly, and has an upright tail, upright ears, loosely spiralling horns, but no beard can be discerned. Maybe a young male stood as model, though some northern breeds have a hardly discernable beard indeed.

13.2.2 *Goats as Transport Means*

Several early and beautiful sculptures of goats as transport means are present on the gateways to the Great Stupa at Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh (c. 50–25 B.C.E.). The three architraves of the eastern gateways illustrate scenes of all kinds of animals worshipping the tree and stupa. On the vertical posts six pairs of different mounts with their riders are shown on the junctions with the architraves. The inner side of the lowest level has two pairs of goats. The pair to the left (fig. 193, below) consists of a horned male with male rider and a hornless female with female rider, whereas the couple to the right consists of two horned males, one with a female rider and the other with a male rider. The central architrave of the northern gateway shows similar goat mounts (fig. 193, above), where the flattened horns in the pair to the right sweep backwards with a slight twist; both goats are horned males. In the pair to the left, the horns are more straight (Plate 12). A small difference between the goats of the eastern and the northern gateways is found

⁷ New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, cat. no. L 2000.8.

in the horns: those of the eastern gateway are grooved, whereas those of the northern gateway are smooth.

An early carving of a draught goat was found at Butkara in Greater Gandhara, Pakistan (first to fourth century, or earlier). Here, a chariot is drawn by two male domestic goats, seen the upright tail, the shape of the horns and the size of the animals. They were incorrectly interpreted as two nilgai, based on an inscription on the reverse;⁸ nilgai are, amongst others, characterised by very short horns and a large body size. It is not clear how many person actually stand on the chariot, and how many stand behind it. The scene resembles a goat-cart race like the ones that are held until today.

13.2.3 *Goats in Narrative Reliefs*

A speaking goat figures in a yet unidentified story which decorates a railing pillar of the Mahabodhi temple at Bodhgaya, Bihar (possibly first century B.C.E.; fig. 194).⁹ The upright tail and the short beard below the chin are unmistakably those of a goat. The goat is sculpted with great care. It is a strong, massive goat, standing proudly on a column.

Horns are very useful in fighting, and it is thus not strange to see one of Mara's soldiers having the head of a male goat on a panel from Greater Gandhara (first to fourth century; fig. 195). The goat-headed soldier stands next to a ram-headed soldier, equally well-equipped. The army is supposed to prevent the Buddha from reaching enlightenment. The beard below the chin and the pendulous ears are realistic, but the horns are much less so. They are short, and look more like a wedged structure emerging from his occipitals.

13.2.4 *Goat-headed Deities*

An early depiction in stone of the goat-headed Jain god Naigamesha comes from Kankali Tila near Mathura, Uttar Pradesh (first to third century; fig. 196). He has short, backwards swept horns, a large beard below the chin and drooping ears. A much later Naigamesha sculpture from the same region is part of a row of mother-goddesses, flanked

⁸ D. Faccenna and M. Taddei, *Sculptures from the Sacred Area of Butkara I (Swat, Pakistan)*, 3 vols (Rome: IsMEO, 1962–1964), vol. II, 3, 132.

⁹ The dating of the railing is unsure, because the whole temple complex has been renovated several times during its long-term use; see Chakravarty, *op. cit.* (1997), 58.

by, amongst others, Shiva and Ganesha, found at the Katra mound at Mathura (tenth to thirteenth century; fig. 197). Naigamesha is the fourth standing figure from the right. His horns are short and upright, and his ears are large and pendulous, much like the centuries older sculpture. Three children seem to surround him here, one is being carried in his left arm, one sits at his left leg on the ground, and one stands next to his right leg. Naigamesha's connection with children is obvious here.

Stone sculptures of the goat-headed Daksha, father of Sati, are rare, if they exist at all because I could trace none. On a brass plaque from Karnataka (eighteenth century), the goat-headed Daksha sits next to Shiva in his manifestation as Virabhadra.¹⁰ This indicates that stone sculptures of Virabhadra could possibly depict Daksha as well.

13.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

One of the earliest goat sculptures dates back to the second century B.C.E. in the form of a decorative relief. The goat has upright ears on this relief. The somewhat later reliefs at Sanchi in Madhya Pradesh figure goats as riding animals; now the ears are pendulous; the horns vary in shape, and a female goat is hornless. Goats figure further in a few narrative reliefs from Greater Gandhara, for example in a scene with a cart race and in Mara's attack. The goat-headed Jain god Naigamesha is hardly depicted, seemingly restricted to northern India. The goat-headed Daksha, father of the Hindu goddess Sati seems not to be depicted at all in stone.

It appears thus that despite the extensive use of goats all over the subcontinent, already since thousands of years ago, their depiction in stone sculptures is limited. The few goat carvings that exist, are however very realistic and these goats are portrayed in much detail. The typically pendulous ears of some Asian goat breeds are already reproduced on reliefs from the first centuries.

¹⁰ Pasadena: Norton Simon Museum, cat. no. M.1974.16.6.S; figured in P. Pal, *Asian Art at the Norton Simon Museum: art from the Indian subcontinent* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), pl. 225.