



The Path of the Unicorn

The Image through the Arts

Catalog of the Exhibition

by

Edited

Elisa Lanza



*The Path of the Unicorn.
The Image through the Arts*

Catalog of the Exhibition

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Castello della Rovere

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ST. JOHN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY		 ST. JOHN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY
	<i>THE PATH OF THE UNICORN. THE IMAGE THROUGH THE ARTS</i>	
	Exhibition by the students of SJIU	
Curated by: Prof. Elisa Lanza Lindsay Wold		
Designed by: Johnny Hill		
Inauguration: May 3, 2013 at 17.00		
Fresco Room, SJIU Castello della Rovere Vinovo (TO)		
Through the 31st of July Campus Art Studio		Info: 011 965 4140 humanities@sjiu.it

INTRODUCTION | ELISA LANZA - LINDSAY WOLD

In 2013 the Departments of Humanities and Fine Arts decided to create a scientific cooperation among several disciplines and found their topic in the image of the unicorn, a symbol shared by different cultures over time, which appears in St. John International University logo. The aim of the research was to investigate the meaning behind the image, as well as the reason for its success over time. The unicorn, a symbol of wisdom and other values such as purity, vigor, and strength, is indeed well suited to represent a university that upholds all of these values.

THE LOGO OF SJIU

The logo of SJIU, created in 2007, was directly inspired by the unicorn depicted in the coat of arms of Vinovo, a town in Piedmont (Italy), where the main campus of the American university is located. This coat of arms is quite recent, since it was introduced in the early 1900s. The previous symbol of Vinovo depicted the Savoy Cross, with the V of Vinovo in the middle. In 1917, the Town Council deliberated to create a new emblem of the city in memory of the major families that had anciently reigned on that territory, the marquises Romagnano and the counts Della Rovere. Thus the unicorn, symbol of the Romagnano family, was introduced.

Over the course of the Spring semester, students from all over the world enrolled in the classes of *Art History*, *Studies in Art History*, *Museum Education*, *Film Studies*, *American Culture*, *Italian*, and *History of Ancient Egypt* investigated the path of the unicorn through their disciplines of study.

Lindsay Wold, a senior in the Art History program, coordinated the works as a practical training in developing her skills to become an art curator through every step of the exhibition process. This ranged from the creation of the scientific project to the arrangement of the final exhibition. Johnny Hill, a study abroad student from Fort Hays State University in Kansas, U.S.A., carefully designed the panels.

THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition explores the theme of the unicorn through the arts from ancient times to contemporary compositions. From antiquity the unicorn has been given many interpretations through different cultures. These interpretations range from myths of healing by its horn to purity, explored in a Christian lecture of the legend.

Research involved archaeological finds, art techniques such as painting, sculpture, mosaic, weaving, and manuscript illuminating, as well as a glimpse into literature and films. Some students were also involved in the production of a short movie, titled *Bitter Business*, reinterpreting the legend of the maiden and the Unicorn with reversed gender roles of protagonist and antagonist. Art History students created a mosaic depicting SJIU's logo, using waste material (colored plastic sheets) in order to fulfill our institution mission, that is Sustainability.

The Exhibition was inaugurated on May 3, 2013 at St. John International University campus. Coincidentally, shortly after our inauguration the Metropolitan Museum of Art inaugurated the exhibition Search for the Unicorn, dedicated to the tapestries depicting this subject, in the occasion of the Cloisters'75th anniversary (May 15, 2013–August 18, 2013).

Given the success of the SJIU exhibition, a version translated into Italian was subsequently inaugurated in the “Ala Comunale Don Donadio” at Vinovo, with the city Major present.

The present catalog hosts the results of the research carried out by the students, the exhibition panels and their Italian translation.

The historical and iconographic analysis of the coat of arms of the City of Vinovo was the subject for Estelle Remy's final work in Spring 2013, during the course of Beginning Italian I held by Professor Alessia Fassone. A valuable source of information for this project was kindly provided by Mr. Gervasio Cambiano, a local historian.

The history of the emblem has highlighted the close link between the city and the Della Rovere family, that anciently ruled over this territory. It is no coincidence that the distinctive symbol of Vinovo, the unicorn, is also the logo of St. John International University (Fig. 1.1), since the university is located in the city Castle, built by this powerful dynasty of rulers in Vinovo.



Fig. 1.1. St. John International University's logo

In ancient times, the coat of arms of Vinovo was formed by the cross of Savoy (a white cross on red background) with a central V, surrounded by an oval frame and topped with a crown. Just one example of this ancient coat of arms is preserved on the façade of the San Desiderio church in the cemetery of Vinovo (Fig. 1.2). This coat of arms was perhaps decorated with a collar (probably the one of the Mauritian Order) interwoven with branches of oak or durmast.

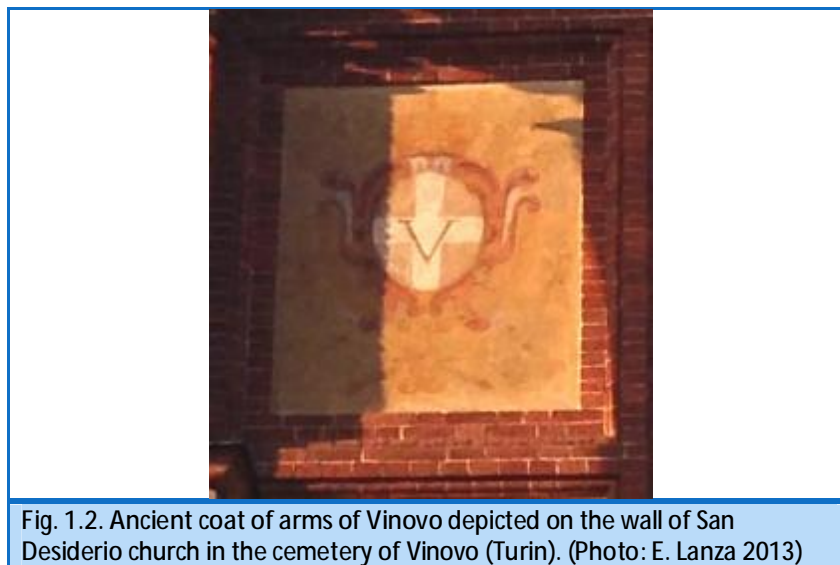
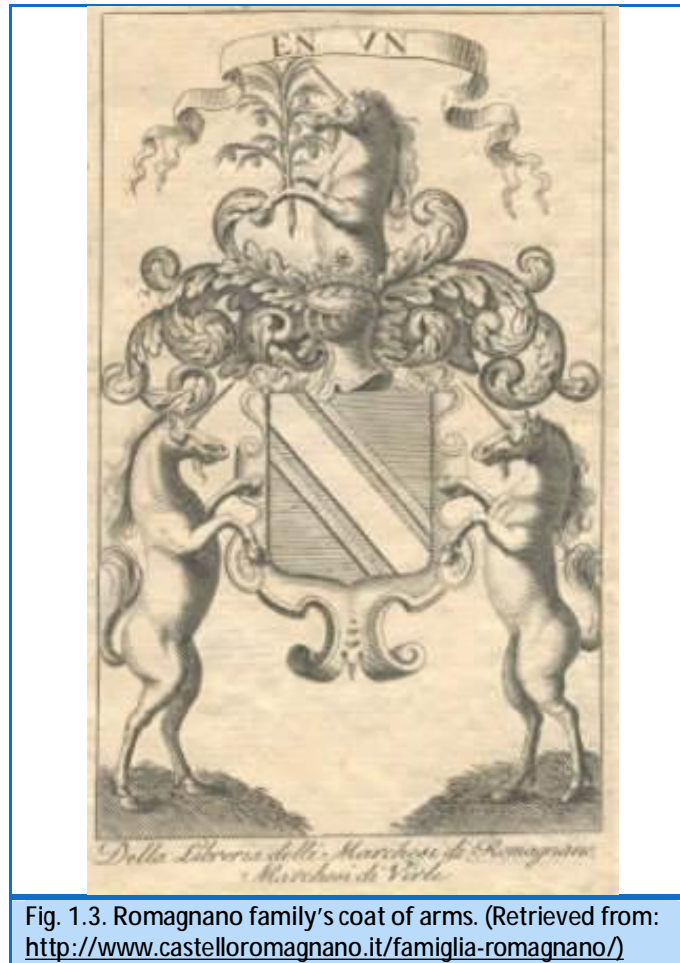


Fig. 1.2. Ancient coat of arms of Vinovo depicted on the wall of San Desiderio church in the cemetery of Vinovo (Turin). (Photo: E. Lanza 2013)

In May 1917, the City Council, realizing that the Vinovo coat of arms was too anonymous since analogous to too many others in the surroundings, decided to adopt a new emblem, which asserted the ancient history of the noble families who had reigned over the city in the past. An archival research revealed that in the Middle Ages (around the 10th and 11th centuries), the territory had been ruled for a long time by the marquises Romagnano, whose blazon showed a composition with two rampant unicorns supporting a shield with a helmet, from which a third unicorn emerged, holding a fruity branch between the paws (Fig. 1.3).



Therefore the image of the rampant unicorn, silver colored on a blue background, was adopted in the new emblem; a towered crown was placed above, together with a tangle of pine branches. The legend "Vicus Novus" (new village), from which the term Vinovo comes, appeared below (Fig. 1.4).



Fig. 1.4a. Vinovo's coat of arms in 1917.
(Courtesy of G. Cambiano)



Fig. 1.4b. Vinovo's coat of arms, drawing.

Currently, the image is supplemented by branches of laurel and oak, as in the other Italian municipalities' coat of arms. Vinovo's unicorn is depicted in a different color, gold, still on a blue background (Fig. 1.5). These colors and plants are the characteristic features of the other family who ruled over the city during the 16th and 17th centuries, the Della Rovere dynasty. Two of its representatives, coming from the branch settled in Liguria, became Pope: Francesco Della Rovere, under the name of Sixtus IV (1414-1484), who was famous for the establishment of the Sistine Chapel, and Giuliano Della Rovere, with the name of Julius II (1443-1513). In their papal coat of arms, as well, both the oak and the two distinctive colors stand out.



Fig. 1.5. Current Vinovo's coat of arms. (Retrieved from:
<http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Vinovo-Stemma.png>)

In Spring 2013, our Art History Class took part in the creation of a mosaic depicting the SJIU's logo, a blue unicorn, in order to analyze the ancient mosaic technique through a hands on approach. Waste material consisting of colored plastic sheets was used in order to fulfill St. John International University's mission, that is stressing the importance of sustainability in the development of our planet.

The mosaic technique is based on the principle of fitting together small pieces of one or different materials, usually with several colors, to create a geometric or figurative pattern on a flat surface. Since Antiquity, this technique was widely exploited both for its functionality and decorative appeal.

The mosaic has a very rich and colorful history. Over the centuries, the technique was created, adapted, and transformed many times. Typically only seen in public and the homes of the wealthy, the mosaic still had more room to develop. This paper aims to investigate the development of the mosaic technique through the centuries, from Mesopotamian culture to Byzantine art.

HISTORY OF THE MOSAIC

The origin of mosaics is the subject of a fierce debate. Some scholars believe that the technique originated in the Sumerian sites of Ur and Uruk (modern Iraq). The Sumerians used to drive clay-cones into the mud walls in order to embellish their buildings.¹ Most other historians agree that mosaics originated from the natural pebble pathways in the East and along the Mediterranean coast.² The latter option is the most logical. The technique was also adopted to embellish the walls of temples and tombs in ancient Egypt.

Originally, the mosaic technique was quite simple and based on the use of natural pebbles, but slowly developed over the centuries. Floors built using colored pebbles gathered from the sea and riverbanks were very sturdy and waterproof. The stones would not get worn out, so the surface would last longer than softer materials used for flooring. Initially this technique was used to pave open spaces such as courtyards. The pebbles were fairly large and laid out in simple geometric patterns. As the technique was perfected, it was used also indoors and began to develop a larger decorative effect. The beautiful pebble floors decorating the houses of the wealthiest in the Classical period were probably cheaper than exquisite oriental carpets.

GREEK MOSAIC TECHNIQUE

Around the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the pebble technique reached its peak in ancient Greece. Mosaicists began painting the pebbles with an array of colors in order to create a more beautiful effect. The pebbles used were much smaller and easier to manipulate, and thin strips of terracotta or lead were used for outlines. Subsequently, stones were cut into smaller fragments in order to create better details and to emulate the painting technique (Fig. 2.1).

¹ Farneti 1993, 23-25.

² Müller 1939, 247.



Fig. 2.1. Pebble mosaic depicting a deer hunt (4th-3rd century BC), signed by Gnosis. Pella, Archaeological Museum (Retrieved from: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnosis_\(artist\)#mediaviewer/File:Deer_hunt_mosaic_from_Pella.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gnosis_(artist)#mediaviewer/File:Deer_hunt_mosaic_from_Pella.jpg))

In the third century BC mosaicists introduced the use of small, cube-shaped pieces of stone called *tesserae*. They were easier to get in bulk, and the artists had a greater variety of colors. Since the tessellated floors were completely flat, this allowed for easier cleaning and waxing, allowing the stones to shine with all of their brilliance. The origin of the *tesserae* is debated. Some scholars maintain that the technique originated in Syracuse (Sicily) and was later taken to Egypt.³ Other scholars agree that the development of *tesserae* may have happened in several locations separately, since there is no concrete evidence suggesting one birth place over another.⁴

The Hellenistic mosaics were fascinating also in the idea that they were made to replace and replicate carpets. Most of the time, they did not cover the entire floor of a space, but were limited to specific sections. Typically square or rectangular in shape, they often included a central panel, called “*emblema*”, created with pieces of marble or terracotta and reproducing a painting.⁵ The “*emblemata*”, designed with brilliant colors, enhanced the overall effect of the mosaic, and emphasized the importance of pictorial art in that time period.

Later on, the size of the *tesserae* was reduced to one cubic millimeter⁶ and the widest possible range of colors was searched for. Such mosaics could nearly compete with wall paintings, through amazing effects of light and volume (Fig. 2.2)

³ Farneti 1993, 29.

⁴ Farneti 1993, 29-31.

⁵ *Ancient Roman Mosaics*.

⁶ Farneti 1993, 31.



Fig. 2.2. Seascape stone mosaic (2nd-1st century BC). Rome, Capitoline Museums (Retrieved from: http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mosaic_seascape_Musei_Capitolini_AntCom32359.jpg)

ROMAN MOSAIC TECHNIQUE

The Romans adapted very quickly the mosaic technique during the second century BC. Their expensive taste comported the use of imported stones and marbles especially to create the central *emblema*. After the first century BC the need for tessellated pavements grew up throughout the Roman Empire. Mosaic floors not only looked nice, but were also waterproof and resistant.⁷ Less wealthy customers adopted monochrome mosaics carrying designs made of only two colors of tesserae: black and white.

Often Roman mosaics covered the entire floor, instead of representing a carpet or rug. Even with monochrome mosaics, designs between different rooms and buildings were differentiated. Most of the time the pattern or iconography would depend on the location of the mosaic. For example some mosaics pictured mythological images in public buildings, marine themes in baths, and erotic scenes in the bedroom.⁸

In the third and fourth centuries AD the desire for colorful mosaics was revived. Unlike previous designs, these exhibited simple two-dimensionality, but still rich with extraordinary color and detail. The use of shading disappeared, while the figures were outlined and put strictly in the foreground, without sense of space (Fig. 2.3).

Roman mosaics used to cover also the walls of the buildings, especially in baths. Most scholars agree that the idea for wall mosaics developed in Rome. Traditionally, the wall mosaics were created with marble, broken glass vessels, pumice stones and other similar materials in order to create a more brilliant effect.

⁷ Mosaic 2013.

⁸ Farneti 1993, 35.



Fig. 2.3. Mosaic (2nd-4th century AD). Worcester, Massachusetts, Worcester Art Museum. (Retrieved from: <http://bobktravels.blogspot.it/>)



Fig. 2.4. Stone and glass mosaic (end of the 2nd century AD). Saint-Romain-en-Gal, Musée Gallo Romain (retrieved from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mus%C3%A9e_GR_de_Saint-Romain-en-Gal_27_07_2011_32.jpg)

Glass *tesserae* were then introduced, which allowed more vivid colors with a very distinct brilliance (Fig. 2.4). *Tesserae* covered columns, pools, and fountains not only for decorative purposes, but also because they were extremely functional: completely waterproof and with a fantastic visual quality in water and humidity.⁹ They were perfect for lining curved surfaces, which allowed their use to be extended. By the second century A.D. the use of glass mosaics spread on walls and vaults of public and private buildings, and especially in large baths.

Glass mosaics became very important in Christianity, when they were the preferred medium to decorate the basilicas. Since the mosaics on the walls were not always perfectly flat as they were on the floors, the churches maintained brilliant plays of light off of the glass *tesserae*. The beautiful light and colors produced were thought to bring a more spiritual experience to the people who visited the churches. During the fourth and fifth centuries, this concept developed even more, but the Roman Empire was falling. The economy was suffering and glass became much more difficult to acquire. Glass mosaics became mostly concentrated in Rome, where they remained in marvelous shape even up into the Middle Ages. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the mosaic techniques were carried on through other cultures.

BYZANTINE MOSAICS

After the collapse of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine civilization continued the development of the mosaic technique, applying it especially on walls and ceilings. Unlike the Roman ones, the Byzantine mosaics were used strictly for religious purposes. The emperor was basically considered to be Christ's representation on Earth and the mosaics depicted this wonderfully. The mosaics typically would show Christ sitting on a throne and surrounded by martyrs, saints, and the virgin. The figures in these mosaics were very rigid, and their facial expressions seemed to be very blank and emotionless. Their bodies were very rigid, showing their spirituality and distance from the rest of life on the earth. For the figures depicted

⁹ Farneti 1993, 39.

in the mosaics, the hands and faces were typically made out of stone tesserae, while the garments and hair were glass.¹⁰

Typical of the Byzantine mosaics was the use of gold *tesserae* (Fig. 2.5). These mosaics had the rigid figures set on a mainly gold background. Gold *tesserae* were used to create a spiritual effect, separating the divine from the human. Artists at the time discovered the beautiful effect they could create by slightly shifting the angle of the gold *tesserae*. Instead of laying all of the pieces completely flat, they would slightly angle some and create marvelous illusions and plays of light.¹¹ Depending on how the spectators moved around the mosaic, they would see different views of the gold and light bouncing off of it, creating a deeply spiritual effect.

Later in the Byzantine Empire, the use of gold *tesserae* mostly died off. Artists became more concerned with making realistic details and adding more color to the mosaics, using smaller *tesserae*, and finer contour lines. Eventually, gold *tesserae* were reintroduced shortly before the collapse of the Byzantine Empire.



Fig. 2.5. Empress Theodora and attendants (AD 526-547). Ravenna, San Vitale (Retrieved from: [http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica_di_San_Vitale_\(Ravenna\)#mediaviewer/File:Ravenna_San_Vitale_Todora.jpg](http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Basilica_di_San_Vitale_(Ravenna)#mediaviewer/File:Ravenna_San_Vitale_Todora.jpg))

CONCLUSION

The history of the ancient mosaic is complex, but very fascinating. Beginning with simple stones placed in geometric patterns, it developed into an amazing art form that rivaled famous paintings. As it was developed, the mosaic originated as a decoration for the dwellings of extremely wealthy people. The

¹⁰ *History of Mosaic Art.*

¹¹ Farneti 1993, 43.

Romans realized the true functionality of this art and made it into a common floor covering. Not only were the mosaics beautiful to look at, they also were amazingly tough. Water-resistant and wear-resistant, they were the perfect solution to the previous floors that were easily ruined. Further development increased the beauty and complexity of the mosaic designs.

Mosaics in the Byzantine Empire had strictly religious purposes. Initially they were simple and did not show any three-dimensionality, with their distinctive use of gold *tesserae* on the background. Later on the use of color became astonishing, producing mosaics that were just as beautiful and detailed as paintings.

The mosaic took many leaps and turns throughout history. Different cultures adapted the techniques and changed them to suit their needs. None are necessarily better than the others, but they all have their own unique qualities.

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CHAPTER 3 . THE PROGRESSION OF THE UNICORN'S ANATOMY THROUGH ART | JOHNNY HILL

Within the confines of history, mankind has seen many symbols and manifestations of its own creation appear and fade with ease. However, none have arguably been as lasting, as pervasive, or as iconic as the image of the unicorn. Likely developing in a time before recorded history, the unicorn is an idea still well-permeated throughout modern culture and recognized in all corners of the globe.

Like any figment of human imagination, though, the unicorn has seen a transformation over the ages that reflects both the geographical and chronological journey it has taken through society. The poor memory (and creative story-telling) of men throughout history creates images that, depending on who you ask, are just a little bit different than the other person's. This is especially true of the unicorn. Comparing the modern definition of unicorn to its most ancient connotation, one would hardly even recognize the same animal.

Such a comparison, of course, is our intent. To do this, we must study the anatomy, as well as the surrounding lore, of this eternal beast. And historically, there is not a more thorough way of investigating a form than through its manifestations in art. The unicorn has been a major theme present in artworks for hundreds of years, and archaeologists discovered depictions dating thousands of years ago. In analyzing the iconography of the unicorn throughout a great span of history, we aim to learn more about the symbol itself and how it affected the civilizations that it reached. By combining zoology with archaeology, and literature with history, we can come to understand just how this creature took its shape, and how that same shape has become the mythological animal we know today as the unicorn.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNICORN IN EASTERN ASIA

Scholars today still argue the ancient origin of the unicorn — that is, no historian can tell us exactly where the first instance of the unicorn was recorded. This is partially owed, obviously, to the fact that they are assumed to be imagined; whether out of artistic creation, or just by humble mistake, we have yet to see physical proof of an animal resembling the unicorn. However, this discrepancy is also a result of the age of the beast itself. The earliest images of unicorns in art reflect a time stuck within the bounds of protohistory. The unicorn (in some form) is just as old, and possibly older, than writing itself.

The ambiguity of the term "unicorn" also plays a role in the struggle to define its first appearance in human culture. Technically, any creature bearing a single horn on its head can be considered as such. The word "unicorn" literally means "one horn"; this name, though, developed as early as ancient Indus writing, and was translated into Greek as *μόνοκερος* (monokeros),¹² and from there Latinized into the word *unicornus*.

Many scholars agree that the first records of such an animal can be found in the ancient Indus civilizations, which resided in and around modern-day India. The medium through which the unicorn was

¹² Humphreys 1951, 377.

first depicted was the stone seal. These devices, made of steatite (a soft rock that becomes much harder when heated), were used to leave impressions in wax (Fig. 3.1).¹³ However, their function extended beyond just sealing documents. Archaeologists believe the objects were treated as amulets by the Indus civilization, giving them spiritual connotations.¹⁴ These seals featured a wide variety of animals, both mythical and natural. The fact that the seals had a religious purpose may explain the presence of magical animals such as the unicorn.



Fig. 3.1. Indus seal portraying a unicorn (retrieved from <http://www.columbia.edu>)



Fig. 3.2. Indus seal portraying a Zebu bull (retrieved from <http://www.ancientindia.co.uk>)

For centuries, it has been debated whether the unicorn was simply an illusion, the result of men simply looking at a two-horned animal in profile. And indeed, such a visual trick may have sowed the land for such a myth to grow. Yet a close look at the breadth of these Indus Valley seals shows that these ancient people distinguished quite clearly between one-horned and two-horned animals. Although the animals on their seals were typically represented in profile (so as to avoid the difficult task of carving accurate perspective), there was one exception. Those animals having two horns, such as oxen, were always depicted with their head turned to show both horns (compare Figs. 3.1 and 3.2). This leads us to conclude that the single-horned animals on the Indus seals were, in fact, unicorns of some type. Further confirmation of this can be found through the presence of sculptures of this era, which depict the same one-horned creature, proving that the ancient Indian civilizations had some idea of this unicorn.

But even if this animal were a unicorn, it was far from the fanciful beast people know today. The body of this unicorn was that of a typical bull, stocky and short. It had an elongated neck, though, and a rather long tail. The horn that protruded from its forehead was always long (discouraging the idea that this animal was some interpretation of the rhinoceros), usually curved, and always either perfectly smooth or ribbed along its majority. It seemed as though this beast were a conglomeration of other animals, perhaps the bull and rhinoceros and antelope all in one. But the result was an animal quite unique to these cultures, one that would continue to persuade humans of its existence for thousands of years.

¹³ Bouw 2008, 72.

¹⁴ Richter-Ushanas 2005, 13-15.

MIGRATION OF THE UNICORN TO THE WESTERN WORLD

The unicorn remained confined within the Asiatic culture for centuries, until about the fifth century BC when its transference to the Western culture occurred. To examine this movement, we must momentarily divert from the topic of art and touch on literature, for the idea of the unicorn was passed on at this point through literary sources, not sculptures or paintings. Presently, the first Western mention of the Indian unicorn is credited to the ancient Greek writer Ctesias of Cnidus. He was a physician who was given the chance to join the court of King Darius II, King of Persia.¹⁵ It was here that Ctesias, who admittedly had never visited India nor seen the unicorn himself, heard of the creature and the myths surrounding it. Upon his return to his home at Cnidus years later, Ctesias wrote two books encompassing everything he had learned in Persia. The second of these books, *Indica* (ca. 398 BC) is now lost, but lives on through a summation of its contents made by the author Photius in the ninth century AD.¹⁶

It would be unjust to merely paraphrase Ctesias' account of the unicorn, so instead we should look at the original text (as given by Nichols 2008, 115) as it pertains to the animal's anatomy:

"There are wild asses in India the size of horses and even bigger. They have a white body, crimson head, and deep blue eyes. They have a horn in the middle of their brow one and a half cubits in length. The bottom part of the horn for as much as two palms towards the brow is bright white..."

Within this description, we can immediately see that either Ctesias had a way of weaving many of the descriptions of animals he heard in Persia into one, or he was merely passing on a rumor that has already been elaborately fabricated. He tells us of a "wild ass," as he calls it, with both a polychromatic pelt and horn. Ctesias goes on to discuss the peculiar behaviors of the animal, many of which allude almost definitely to the Indian rhinoceros. Where is it, though, that he achieves these multicolored features, as well as the enormous horn? Shepard discusses the possibility of the rhinoceros' anatomy being combined with that of the Mesopotamian wild ass and the Tibetan antelope *antbolos hodgsoni* (1930, 9-13).

The strange body coloration can be attributed to one of two sources: an exaggeration of the natural pattern of the wild ass' fur, which is typically tinted red towards its back, with a light grey underbelly; or possibly, the vivid colors of the rhinoceros depicted in the tapestries of that era.

As for the horn, the most likely animal contributing such a size and shape of horn is the *antbolos hodgsoni*. This antelope, discussed as one of the most likely candidates of history to be mistaken for a unicorn, features *two* long, slender, and straight horns like that of a stereotypical unicorn. And Ctesias also mentions the horn of this "unicorn" is often turned into a sort of drinking cup in the ancient Asian cultures;

¹⁵ Shepard 1930, 7.

¹⁶ Nichols 2008, 9. According to Nichols, Photius was a Byzantine scholar who summarized Ctesias' work in his own epitome; the popularity of Photius' work may have actually led to Ctesias' work being lost, as it was more concise and easier to read through.

these cups, which have actually been found to be made of rhinoceros horn, were most likely painted red, white, and black as decoration, attributing to the tale of these colors being on the horn of the animal itself. Most of the accounts of unicorns from this time, in fact, tell of it having some variation of this red, white, and black pattern (instead of the pure white horn we know of today).

Ctesias may have been the first to describe the anatomy of this peculiar beast, but he most definitely was not the last. Some of the greatest classical authors and scientists after him – including Aristotle, Aelian, and Pliny the Elder – wrote about the unicorn in their works. Aristotle most definitely based his description on Ctesias' work, while Aelian merely described the Indian rhino and gave it an antelope's horn instead of its own. And despite the popularity of Pliny's works across all of Latin Europe, it was Ctesias' account of the beast that influenced the majority of the unicorn artwork of the following centuries.

It is necessary to reiterate that the lack of unicorns in the artwork of the last centuries BC does not in any way undermine its importance. Although it would take years to catch on as an artistic centerpiece, the unicorn had already made its way into literature, science, and even medicine of Europe.¹⁷ But next we must look to its era of progression into the Western arts, so as to analyze its continuing development in both anatomy and history.

SOLIDIFICATION OF THE IMAGE OF THE MODERN UNICORN

Before we see the unicorn's emergence in artworks, it must first appear in one last, but highly important, piece of literature. The book in question is *Physiologus*, a collection of extremely popular fables that were written in Alexandria in the third century AD¹⁸ and quickly spread across Europe and the Near East.¹⁹ The tales in this book each revolved around a specific animal (the unicorn one of them, of course) and also alluded to the stories and lessons presented in the Bible.

This link between Christianity and the unicorn was no coincidence, though, and was actually one of the most significant reasons it grew so popular in the next centuries. As the religion itself spread in the first centuries AD, the unicorn had slowly been adopted as a symbol for Jesus Christ, himself. *Physiologus* described the unicorn as a smaller animal, very much like a goat with one horn. It claimed the beast was wild, and was a very strong and proud animal; features probably aiding in the comparison to Christ. When the *Physiologus* became common in the fourth century, I hypothesize that it solidified the connection between Jesus and the unicorn as a symbol. As a result, it is at this point that it starts to appear in the art of Christian churches.

¹⁷ Humphreys describes the rage of unicorn horn as medicine in the Medieval European and Asian markets. As the unicorn horn was believed to have magical properties, its "horn" was sold in different forms, and was usually actually narwhal tusk. Due to its "cure-all" power, it was an extremely pricey and difficult item to obtain.

¹⁸ Scholars disagree on the date of origin of the *Physiologus* - whether it was produced in the 3rd or 4th century AD. Despite the exact date, it is agreed that the book was distributed during the 4th century at the latest.

¹⁹ Humphreys 1951, 379-380.

In her 2007 study, Tagliatesta found the earliest Christian artistic reference to the unicorn in the baptistery at Hawarti, a village in Syria.²⁰ This church features a mosaic, dating to the late fourth or early fifth century, depicting a unicorn with goat-like features (such as the tail and cleft hooves) and a curved horn. (There is also another very similar mosaic in the church that dates to the sixth century.)

In the early Christian churches, mosaics were the most basic and most useful artistic medium. In addition to their ease of construction, mosaics also functioned as durable surfaces for floors and walls. Furthermore, it was easy to create mosaics on a very large scale. For these reasons, the following centuries saw a great number of instances of unicorns in Christian mosaic work.

The unicorn progressed through the Middle Ages fairly consistently; in most cases, the unicorn of this era looked distinctively either like the goat or the horse. The animal's colors were often varied, but were becoming more consistently white, like the creature known today. However, the horn was an issue of debate for centuries (ranging from straight to curved, and differing greatly in lengths), until it became a highly-sought item of the European markets. It does sound unbelievable that the traders of the late Middle Ages onward hunted for the unicorn horn as a prized item. But in fact, the unicorn horn was regarded as one of the most valuable treasures of this time, and were only owned by the most noble men. These items did not actually come from the head of some horse-like animal, of course; rather, the treasures were found on the northern coasts of Europe, where they washed up with or without their owners attached. These "horns" were actually the long, spiraled tusk of the narwhal, the small whale native to the Arctic Ocean.

It was these horns that became the model for artists to recreate their image of the unicorn, with its long and spiraled horn. As the image of this new horn spread, the predecessors of the early Middle Ages and earlier (those curved, irregular, stubby, or ebony horns) became practically extinct.

The hooves of the unicorn developed with less ease. It is unclear how the transformation occurred, but a definite change is visible over the centuries from cleft to solid hooves. It took hundreds of years after the *Physiologus* for artists to begin straying from the strictly goat-like form, and to utilize solid hooves for their beasts. The frieze of the Parma Baptistery in northern Italy is an early example of this, featuring two unicorns each with clearly solid hooves (Fig. 3.3). It is hard to say if these hooves were from a wild ass, such as the ones described by Ctesias and the like, or if they were strictly equine.



Fig. 3.3. Unicorns on a frieze at the Parma Baptistery, Northern Italy (after Tagliatesta 2007, 186, fig. 10)

²⁰ Tagliatesta 2007, 179-180.

Clearly, a reformation of the unicorn was occurring to make it more horse-like (such a strong reformation that it still remains the accepted image of the unicorn today). Images of unicorns such as that found in the Otranto Cathedral (Fig. 3.4) show a midpoint of this progression, wherein the unicorn is a mixture of goat and horse. In this case, the creature has the head of a horse, but the body and hooves are that of a goat. These animals showed a deviation from the goat-unicorn that was so ingrained into the art of the early Middle Ages. Slowly, the unicorn became aggressively more equine.



Fig. 3.4. Unicorn mosaic at the Otranto Cathedral (after Tagliatesta 2007, 184, fig. 9)



Fig. 3.5. Royal coat of arms of the United Kingdom (retrieved from <http://www.bryanrawlings.com>)

For one possible explanation, we can look to the unicorn as a heraldic symbol (Fig. 3.5). According to Shepard (1930, 50), the marks of heraldry featuring unicorns were "devised by men who had rather more confidence in the classic writers of antiquity than they had in the Bestiaries". This resulted in a unicorn drawing more from the classical equine or asinine interpretation than the recent goatish forms. However, the symbolic meanings from *Physiologus* and later were retained in these coats of arms, leaving a very Christ-like but equine unicorn.

From this time the pure image of the unicorn stays relatively static. In both heraldic signs and paintings of the post-Medieval ages, one can easily identify the unicorn as similar to the modern image: a white horse-like animal, with the stereotypical spiraled white horn, and only occasionally featuring a goat's beard.

CONCLUSION

It would be counterintuitive to analyze the art of the last three centuries too conspicuously, for the anatomy of the unicorn remains constant throughout. Rather, it is the previous two millennia that prove important to the development of its anatomy. From the antelope-horned oxen of ancient India to the white stallions of Scotland, the unicorn has seen countless incarnations in dozens of cultures. Its anatomies have

been almost as numerous as the names it has been given.²¹ From horn to hooves, the unicorn can be something different to whomever you ask.

The unicorn can take a thousand different forms. But no matter which you look at, it is still the same animal that has captivated human beings for thousands of years. Its horn has convinced people of its magical powers of healing and purification; its body has shown its strength and power; and the hooves, whether solid or cloven, have always symbolized swiftness and freedom. A beast so believably natural, but just mythical enough, the unicorn has skeptics even today wondering if such an animal could have actually existed. Whether looking more like a goat, a bull, or an antelope, the unicorn is a creature close enough to existing animals that we may never know if this anatomy is actually possible.

But alas, such a study would be nothing without the presence of its main catalyst: art. By studying the art of many societies, we can see how this anatomy changed and how it affected the mystery of the unicorn. From the ancient stone seals of the Indus to the paintings of the Middle Ages, the unicorn has proved a timeless subject for artists. And each time, its anatomy is just a little different, making you wonder what the unicorn will look like in another thousand years.

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²¹ Other names for the unicorn, other than those already mentioned, include *liocorno* and *unicorno* (Italian), *Einhorn* (German), and *licorne* (French). In each case, we can see that the word literally translates to mean "one horn."

The unicorn has been an ever-present mythical creature interwoven into the art production from medieval sculptures, manuscripts and tapestries to modern graphic design. Tapestries remain one of the best examples of the medieval art production illustrating such a subject. The intricate patterns and rich colors woven together covered the walls of the stone structures that were built throughout modern Europe. The subject matter that was woven varied, and in the case of the mythical unicorn, two series of tapestries have been preserved. Both being woven at the end of the 15th century, *The Hunt of the Unicorn* and *The Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries, symbolize two possible interpretations of the unicorn.²² At the time when the artists designed these tapestries, it was a shift into a new period of art, one that was focused on the brilliance of colors and the rediscovered ideas of perspective. This transitional stage is evident in both series.

THE HUNT OF THE UNICORN

The first series of seven tapestries, *The Hunt of the Unicorn*, was woven between 1495 and 1505.²³ Originating under the hands of a weaver from Netherlands, the tapestries were woven with different materials such as wool, silk, and metallic threads. This combination of materials is one of the reasons for the vibrancy in color still visible today. The tapestries, firstly commissioned for the home of the French nobles, the La Rouchefoucauld family, have always been recorded as being shown together.²⁴



Fig. 4.1. The Start of the Hunt, detail. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tapestry, 368 x 315 cm (after Freeman 1976, 16)

²² Nickel 1982, 9.

²³ Freeman 1976, 175.

²⁴ The Metropolitan Museum of Art (n.id.).

The series depicts the progression of the hunt for the unicorn with a set of noblemen who are working alongside a group of hunters. Each tapestry shows a step of the hunting process, which was considered a noble activity.

The first tapestry depicts the point where the hunters enter the woods in search of the unicorn (Fig. 4.1). They are surrounded by a thick setting of greenery, with the artist using the stylistic traits of *horror vacui*, that is the process of covering the whole surface of the image with patterns and imagery. There is a forward motion that fills the bodies of the men depicted as well as the examples of canines that are guiding the hunters to the unicorn.

The moment where the beast is found in the act of resting next to a fountain is the subject of the second tapestry (Fig. 4.2). Surrounded by examples of exotic animals, the unicorn lies unaware of the hunters that are viewing, partially masked by the greenery of the forest that has been trekked through. The hunters are caught in the act of discussion, assuming they are plotting the plan of capture. The figure of the unicorn carries the anatomical makeup of a horse to the spectator, almost appearing far from unique, until the horn is recognized, almost blending into the water that is flowing from the fountain.



Fig. 4.2. The Unicorn is Found, detail. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tapestry, 368 x 379 cm (after Freeman 1976, 18)

The moment of attack is presented in the third item of the series (Fig. 4.3). This is the first complete view that the spectator receives of the unicorn, and it is a moment of complete chaos as the hunters are interwoven into the forest greenery alongside the hunting dogs. A tree, bare of branches and leaves, strikes through the center of the tapestry, as a way to create perspective in the scene. It contrasts alongside the spears held by the hunters against the horn of the unicorn. With all the vibrant colors and variations of expressions that fill the faces of the hunters, there is a sense of serenity that emerges from the white at the center of the tapestry, the image of the unicorn.



Fig. 4.3. *The Unicorn Leaps out of the Stream*, detail. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tapestry, 368 x 427 cm (after Freeman 1976, 20)

The fourth panel (Fig. 4.4) reveals a more aggressive moment, depicting the unicorn fighting back as it tries to escape the clutches of the hunters. The use of perspective is far greater in this piece in comparison to the second one, and the unicorn is portrayed in a more aggressive position of attack as the horn pierces the dog at the left side of the tapestry. Depicting the unicorn in a sense of violence was not common in art, because the fact that this creature would be capable of such actions took away from the beauty that was held within its mystic presence in a scene.



Fig. 4.4. *The Unicorn at Bay*, detail. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tapestry, 368 x 401 cm (after Freeman 1976, 22)

Despite the animal's nature depicted in the fourth scene, the fifth illustrates the defeat of the unicorn and its procession to the castle (Fig. 4.5). The unicorn is not the focal point of this panel, although it is the focus of the series. Instead the castle and those who are outside its gates to receive the unicorn take up the focus of this tapestry. The defeat of the unicorn is at the top left, and the eye of the unicorn gazes straight out to the spectator, unlike any of the other figures in the composition.



Fig. 4.5. *The Unicorn is Killed and Brought to the Castle, detail*. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tapestry, 368 x 389 cm (after Freeman 1976, 26)

The sixth part of the series is the only tapestry that is not completely preserved. It remains in only two fragments, entitled the *Mystic Capture of the Unicorn* (Fig. 4.6). It is still possible to make out what the tapestry originally portrayed. It is assumed that this piece is the example of the nobles accepting the body of the unicorn from the hunters. The preserved scene depicts a close view of a dog attacking the back of the unicorn, whose distinctive horn is visible. Above stands the female noble, who is recognized from the fifth portion of the series. She holds her left hand up as a matter of receiving the offering of the capture.



Fig. 4.6. Two fragments of the lost tapestry from the *Unicorn Tapestries* (detail). The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tapestry, 1.98 x 0.65 m, 1.69 x 0.65 m (after Freeman 1976, 24)

In the last panel, the unicorn is seen alive once more, enclosed in a cage (Fig. 4.7). It is the sole representation of the unicorn alone in the whole series, and also leads to one of the main interpretations of what the unicorn represents in art. Viewed alone, with no other animals or figures of hunters and nobles present, the unicorn, considered being a resurrected being, recalls the rebirth of Christ.¹ Even though the unicorn is treasured and valued, some nobles still choose to pursue, attack, and kill this precious figure. After it is presented as being destroyed in the castle of the rulers, the mystic creature reincarnates and is in what seems to be another world.

The transitioning elements of medieval art to Renaissance are evident in the colors and presence of a slight focus in perspective. Although the designer still utilized techniques that recall the medieval style, such as the elongated figures and the *horror vacui*, he also added a focus on presenting three-dimensionality, creating a sense of basic perspective, as well as the vibrancy in colors that fills both series. The colors in *The Lady and the Unicorn*, instead, are not as vibrant as they once were, due to the lack of preservation, but their original strength is still evident to the spectators.



Fig. 4.7. *The Unicorn in Captivity*, detail. The Metropolitan Museum of Art. Tapestry, 368 x 252 cm (after Freeman 1976, 28)

THE LADY AND THE UNICORN

A second series of tapestries dated to the end of the 15th century also shows the image of the unicorn. This set, including six tapestries, was produced in the Netherlands as well, and is linked to drawings that were found in Paris from the same time. Woven with wool and silk, the tapestries are considered to have been as vibrant as *The Hunt of the Unicorn*, but have not been under such strict preservation policies.

Five of the tapestries are considered to be depicting the five senses, with the final representing the allegory of desire.²⁵ Each panel contains the unicorn juxtaposed to a noble female as well as examples of other exotic animals. The unicorn is placed to the lady's left in all six tapestries, likely carrying a symbolic meaning. A lion instead flanks her right side, always giving a sense of a frame and focus on the lady and the gestures that determine the connection with the allegories of the five senses. Only in the tapestry representing touch, the lady interacts directly with the unicorn, specifically touching its horn.

The horn of the unicorn was considered highly valuable to the nobles of Medieval Europe. If one could be obtained, it was considered to bring a magical quality to the lives of the owners. The tapestry titled *Desire* is the widest and final piece in the series. Woven with the inscription "À Mon Seul Désir", which can be roughly translated to "according to my desire alone", this piece signifies love, and the passions that can be created by the other five senses.

In this series, the unicorn remains the object of nobility, but is not the focus of the tapestries. Its presence is significant to note due to the consistent positioning and the importance it must have held to the commissioner, a nobleman from the court of King Charles VII. The pennants that are shown in all six of the tapestries bear the coat of arms of this nobleman, Jean le Viste.

THE MODERN DISPLAY

The two series of tapestries nowadays are placed in modern museums, outside of their original setting. *The Hunt of the Unicorn* was donated to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1937 and placed in The Cloisters.²⁶ This area of the museum was designed as a recreation of the medieval architecture in order to house the collection in a more authentic representation. The seven tapestries hang on the walls, recreating the decorations that they once stood as for the La Rouchefoucauld family.²⁷

After it was rediscovered in 1841, instead, *The Lady and the Unicorn* has remained in its country of origin, France. Currently displayed in a circular room at the Musée de Cluny in Paris, the series represents a tie to the past rulings of the monarchy. This series is displayed in a modern setting, in a curved arrangement which allows the spectator to enjoy each detail of the artworks.

²⁵ *Textiles*.

²⁶ Freeman 1949, 237.

²⁷ A special exhibition, *Search for the Unicorn*, took place between May 15 and August 18, 2013 celebrating the 75th anniversary of The Cloisters, located at the MET in New York.

CONCLUSION

Today as centuries ago, when the tapestries were woven, the unicorn represents a powerful subject, one that can evoke different emotions. Through the tapestries the spectator is given the chance to feel the various sensations deriving from the mythical creature. The vibrant colors and mythical subjects are an out of body experience for the spectators, and take them into a world of fantasy through high art expression.

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Pliny the Elder described in the first century AD.²⁸ Descriptions of the unicorn have varied extensively over the past centuries, including a wide array of mystical powers and body parts from various animals, such as the horse, elephant, goat, panther, lion, and boar. The unicorn's anatomy eventually settled as a white, horse-like creature with the hooves of a goat, the tail of a lion, and a single spiral horn jutting out from the center of its forehead.

“The unicorn... is the fiercest animal, and it is said that it is impossible to capture one alive. It has the body of a horse, the head of a stag, the feet of an elephant, the tail of a boar, and a single black horn three feet long in the middle of its forehead. Its cry is a deep bellow”

The peculiarity of such an extraordinary creature caused the unicorn to come alive in the imaginations of people throughout history, and especially during the Middle Ages. A popular story during that time connected the unicorn with the maiden. The couple was originally depicted in medieval bestiaries. Christianity also gained a hold on the two, and used them as symbols of the Passion of the Christ and the Annunciation. This also led to the depictions of women with unicorns in order to accentuate their chastity. Because of the connection between the virgin and the unicorn, the last became a popular creature that exists even in today's culture.

THE VIRGIN AND THE UNICORN

The idea of a virgin and a unicorn eventually became a symbol of many concepts, but began as the story of the hunt of the unicorn, which was portrayed as an animal that was too fast, too strong, and too nimble to be captured. Hunters did not aspire for the unicorn itself, but for its prized horn. This was highly valued, because thought to be able to detect poison and to render poisons harmless.

According to the legend, the only way a unicorn could be captured was through the use of a maiden. The virgin girl would be left alone in a forest or garden where a unicorn had previously been spotted. “The unicorn... because of its intemperance, not knowing how to control itself before the delight it feels towards maidens, forgets its ferocity and wildness, and casting aside all fear it will go up to the seated maiden and sleep in her lap...” described Renaissance artist Leonardo da Vinci in his notes.²⁹ This left the unicorn in a vulnerable position, which allowed the hunters to easily capture and kill it. The 1463 oil painting by Francesco Di Giorgio Martini, *Chastity with the Unicorn*, depicts the traditional scene (Fig. 5.1).

²⁸ Plinius, *Naturalis Historia*, XI, 106.

²⁹ Bambach, Stern, and Manges 2003, 308.

The beautiful maiden holds out an arm in consolation of the frightened unicorn, which runs to her lap for shelter.

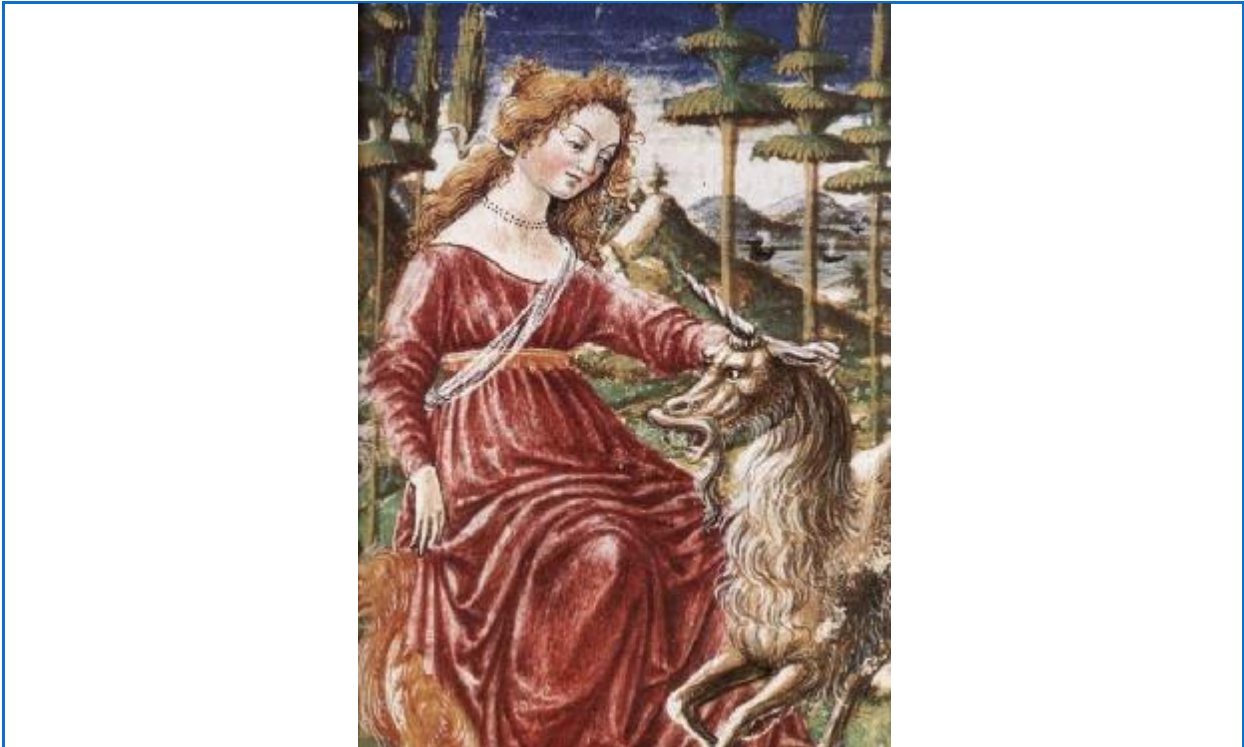


Fig. 5.1. *Chastity with the Unicorn* (1463), Francesco Di Giorgio Martini.

Private Collection. Oil on canvas (retrieved from

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Francesco_di_Giorgio,_castit%C3%A0_e_unicorno.jpg)

THE BESTIARIES

Before oil paintings like *Chastity with the Unicorn* became prevalent, unicorns were originally depicted in medieval bestiaries. The bestiary was an encyclopedia-like compilation of what were believed to be existing animals. It contained not only pictures and descriptions of animals, but also stories involving the animals with a moral theme. Standard misconceptions included the existence of sirens, dragons, basilisks, the phoenix, griffins, and, of course, the unicorn.

An early depiction of a unicorn in a bestiary was produced ca. 1230 by an unknown author and is currently held in the British Library (Fig. 5.2). Accompanying the description of the unicorn, the illustration portrays a scene in which a nude maiden protectively embraces a unicorn, which is asleep on her lap. A man is standing to the side of them holding a spear, which is piercing the unicorn in its side. The female is probably depicted naked in order to accentuate her purity.



Fig. 5.2. *The Unicorn. Bestiary* (ca. 1230). London, The British Library. Illuminated Manuscript (retrieved from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)



Fig. 5.3. *How to Capture a Unicorn. Bestiary* (ca. 1235). London, The British Library. Illuminated Manuscript (retrieved from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)

Another image taken from a bestiary, *How to Capture a Unicorn*, was crafted in 1235 and is currently held at the British Library (Fig. 5.3). It also depicts a maiden embracing a unicorn as it is attacked, but unlike the previous work, the virgin is richly clothed. Three men are attacking the unicorn: one man stabs the unicorn with a spear, one with a sword, and the third one bears an axe. Additionally, the unicorn appears less like the traditional image resembling a horse, and more alike a panther or a similar large feral cat, with a very elongated, slender horn jutting from its forehead.



Fig. 5.4. *The Annunciation to Mary* (14th century). Cambridge, Corpus Christi College. Illuminated Manuscript (retrieved from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)

A third image taken from a bestiary is *The Annunciation to Mary*, which was produced in the fourteenth century by an unknown artist and is currently held in Cambridge (Fig. 5.4). It is a later depiction of the Virgin holding a unicorn as it is struck, and it is a combination of details from both the aforementioned scenes taken from the bestiaries.

THE PASSION OF CHRIST

As the tale of the virgin and the unicorn spread throughout Europe, it transformed into symbols of Christianity. The tale of the hunt of the unicorn became a metaphor of the Passion of the Christ. The unicorn represented Christ, incarnate in Mary's womb, then captured by the Jews, and eventually killed. Its wildness showed the helplessness of hell to hold Christ. The single horn was identified with the unity of God and Christ. The small size of the unicorn symbolized Christ's humility in becoming human.

Some of the most famous depictions of this symbolism is *The Hunt of the Unicorn* tapestries. They are a set of seven tapestries woven ca. 1495 to 1505, now housed in The Cloisters at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Each tapestry tells a portion of the myth of the hunt of the unicorn. "The (re) are deliberate symbolic parallels in the tapestries between the treatment of the unicorn and the torments and crucifixion of Christ."³⁰ The first tapestry, *The Start of the Hunt*, depicts a group of men, their horses, and their hunting dogs at the beginning of their quest for the unicorn. The second panel shows the hunters gathering around a unicorn that is touching its horn into a stream.³¹ In the third scene, *The Unicorn Leaps out of the Stream*, the hunters begin their assault on the unicorn. The beast jumps the stream and is able to escape the hunters, who might represent the persecutors of Jesus attacking him.³² *The Unicorn at Bay*, the fourth tapestry, depicts the unicorn in the midst of its battle against the assailants. A man blowing a horn, a newcomer to the hunt, was possibly read as a representation of the archangel Gabriel. In the fragmented fifth tapestry, *The Unicorn is Captured by the Maiden*, following the tradition of the bestiaries, a maiden is providing shelter for the unicorn, which is running from the hunters. Unlike the virgins in the bestiaries, the girl in the tapestry almost looks evil. It is obvious that she is aware of how she is betraying the unicorn and causing its eventual death. She smirks as she spots a hunter who has found her and is calling to the others in the hunting party. In contradiction to the previous thought, it is believed that the maiden could represent the Virgin Mary in the tapestry.³³ There is also symbolism in the background of the tapestry. The apple tree growing in the middle of the garden might allude to the biblical tale of Adam and Eve. This proposes that Christ, the unicorn, is the Redemption of souls after the Fall of Adam and Eve.³⁴ The white roses symbolize Mary's virginity and the red roses symbolize Mary's charity and compassion.³⁵ Representing how only a virgin maiden can capture unicorns, the fence around the garden the two are situated in accentuates the chastity of the maiden.³⁶

³⁰ Psycheskiner 2013.

³¹ Freeman 1976, 21.

³² Freeman 1976, 23-24.

³³ Freeman 1976, 25.

³⁴ Albertini and Pastor 1997.

³⁵ Unknown 2013b.

³⁶ Albertini and Pastor 1997.

In the sixth tapestry the unicorn appears to be slain and is brought to the castle, whose owners will use the horn for its magical benefits. The unicorn may symbolize the slain Christ, and people stare with stunned expressions as the beast is paraded through the village.

The final tapestry, *The Unicorn in Captivity*, is the most famous. Here the unicorn appears to be alive once again, lounging in a fenced-in area and tied to a tree. The risen unicorn can be seen as a symbolism of Jesus Christ rising from the dead. It is also seen as a symbol of a bridegroom, because the unicorn is chained to a fence. The obvious representation is that the unicorn is Christ, who rose to life again after His crucifixion (*The Unicorn Tapestries*). “However, since the unicorn is chained there is some confusion to this symbolism. One theory is that the unicorn, like Jesus Christ, is linked to life or humanity forever.”³⁷

THE ANNUNCIATION

The legend of the maiden and the unicorn was also used as a symbol for the relationship between the Virgin Mary and Christ. The connection of the unicorn to Jesus Christ was made because of many reasons. Text taken from a medieval bestiary explained, “The fact that it has just one horn on its head means what he himself said: ‘I and the Father are One.’ Also, according to the Apostle: ‘The head of Christ is the Lord.’ ...It is described as a tiny animal on account of the lowliness of his incarnation, as he said himself: ‘Learn from me, because I am mild and lowly of heart.’”³⁸ The maiden is seen as a symbol of the Virgin Mary because, “as the unicorn surrendered his fierceness and became vulnerable through his encounter with the maid, so Christ surrendered his divine nature and became human through the Virgin Mary.”³⁹



Fig. 5.5. *Annunciation as Hunt of the Unicorn* (15th century). Hereford, Ebstorf Cathedral. Liturgical hanging (retrieved from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)

³⁷ Albertini and Pastor 1997.

³⁸ White 1954.

³⁹ Unknown 2013b.

Annunciation as Hunt of the Unicorn, painted in the 15th century and currently housed in the Ebstorf Cathedral in Germany, is one such depiction of the Holy Annunciation represented through the imagery from the legend of the hunt of the unicorn (Fig. 5.5). The legend is shown in that the maiden (the Virgin Mary) warmly embraces the small unicorn (Jesus), which is asleep on her lap. The hunters in the tale are shown as the archangel Gabriel, chases the unicorn to Mary blowing a horn and accompanied by hunting dogs. Beyond following the legend, many purely Christian images are seen in the picture. An illustration of God is seen on the upper corner of the tapestry overseeing what is happening on the Earth. “Within the walls Mary is accompanied by Old Testament types for the Virgin and/or the Incarnation: the ivory tower, Gideon’s fleece, the morning sun, the covered fountain, the golden urn and the flowering rod a Aaron at the altar.”⁴⁰



Fig. 5.6. *The Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn Representing Annunciation* (1489), Martin Schongauer. Moscow, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts. Oil on panel (retrieved from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)

A contemporary image that has many similarities to *Annunciation as Hunt of the Unicorn* is *The Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn Representing Annunciation* (Fig. 5.6). It was painted in 1489 by Martin Schongauer and is currently housed at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow, Russia. This image is more simplified; the Old Testament types for the Virgin are not depicted.

CHASTITY

Both inside and outside of Christianity, the unicorn was seen as a symbol of the maiden’s chastity. Only a female that is an innocent virgin could attract a unicorn to slumber on her lap. Because of this, a female depicted with a unicorn was inferred to be a virgin. “...only the purity of a sweet virgin could attract a

⁴⁰ Unknown 2013a.

creature representing these attributes.”⁴¹ In some cases, a painting of a female would include a small unicorn simply to insinuate that the female was virgin. One example is the portrait of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, called *Young Woman with Unicorn*, which was painted in 1506 by Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino and is currently housed at the Galleria Borghese in Rome (Fig. 5.7). Possibly inspired by Leonardo Da Vinci’s *Mona Lisa*, the portrait is typical in that it is of a seated woman in front of a landscape background. In her arms, rests a small unicorn. The unicorn was strategically placed there in order to show to the viewer Saint Catherine of Alexandria is a chaste woman. Another example of the unicorn used for the purpose of indicating that a woman is a virgin is in a painting of Saint Justina (Fig. 5.8).⁴² “The unicorn is the symbol of female chastity, and so is given to the Virgin, though only very rarely, and to St. Justina of Antioch...” explained Major Arthur De Bles in his book.⁴³ The painting, *St. Justina with the Unicorn*, is one such example of the saint depicted with a unicorn. It was painted ca. 1530 by Moretto da Brescia and is currently at the Kunsthistorisches Museum. The painting depicts a typical scene from its time period of a woman and a man with a natural landscape in the background. What makes this painting unique, though, is the unicorn jutting awkwardly out from the side of the portrait. Having no connection to anything else that is going on in the scene, it simply sits beside Saint Justina. The only purpose of the unicorn in the painting is to infer that the saint is a virgin.



Fig. 5.7. *Young Woman with Unicorn* (1506), Raffaello Sanzio da Urbino. Rome, Galleria Borghese. Oil on panel (retrieved from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)



Fig. 5.8. *St Justina with the Unicorn* (ca. 1530), Moretto da Brescia. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum. Oil on wood (retrieved April 13, 2013 from http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Moretto_da_Brescia_-_St_Justina_with_the_Unicorn_-_WGA16220.jpg)

⁴¹ Burr 2013.

⁴² Shepard 1930, 50.

⁴³ De Bles 1923.

CONCLUSION

The image of the unicorn was created as a mythical creature, such as the griffins, the dragons, the basilisks or the sirens. Given its connection to the maiden, however, the unicorn easily gave birth to several interpretations, which developed its iconography. The induction by the Christian faith as a symbol of the Passion of Christ and the Annunciation, together with the use of the legend to represent female chastity, transformed the unicorn into a widely known icon, whose image spread throughout the world. Though its connection to the maiden has been lost in modern times, the image of the unicorn is still well solidified in modern-day culture.

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CHAPTER 6 . THE UNICORN IN AMERICAN CULTURE | STEFANO CROTTA - SILVIA DUCHI - JOHN FRIGNOCCA - STEFANO GEMELLO - CLAUDETTE JEREZ - ELISA LANZA - RACHEL STRONG - EMANUELE TAVERNA

Probably brought to the New World through European heraldry, the unicorn often appears in modern American culture. In art, literature, and the film industry, this imaginary creature evokes magic as well as fantastic worlds of pureness. On the other hand, the unicorn is sometimes interpreted by popular culture as a figure of parody, even a trivial element.

6.1. UNICORNS IN AMERICAN FANTASY | RACHEL STRONG

Fantasy is often characterized by a departure from the accepted rules by which individuals perceive the world around them; it represents that which is impossible, unexplainable, and outside the parameters of our known reality.

In *The Last Unicorn* (1968), Peter S. Beagle takes the reader on the journey of a female unicorn.⁴⁴ At the beginning all she knows is that she is alone, but when she discovers that she is potentially the last of her kind, she goes on an adventure to find out why she is the last unicorn on earth.

The protagonist embarks on a quest with a magician to King Haggard's castle to find other unicorns. They are attacked by a red bull that belongs to King Haggard. The King admits he has all the other unicorns trapped. Determined to free her species, the unicorn drives the bull into the ocean and saves the others.

As the author says, "Always be yourself unless you can be a unicorn, then always be a unicorn."

The Unicorn Chronicles (1994-2010) by Bruce Coville follow the journey of Cara, a girl sent on a mission by her grandmother, into Luster, the land of the unicorns.⁴⁵ There she discovers the mysterious connection between her family and the unicorns and must battle the evil that threatens both their worlds. With the help of an unlikely band of friends and a magical amulet, Cara takes up the quest to save Luster and uncover the dark secrets of her family's past.

⁴⁴ Beagle 1968. A new edition of Peter S. Beagle's *The Last Unicorn* was published in 2008.

⁴⁵ Coville 1994. Coville 1999. Coville 2008. Coville 2010.

The series *Killer Unicorns* (2009-2011) by Diana Peterfreund is again centered on the fantasy world of the unicorns. Rampart and Ascendant follow the story of Astrid, a young girl who was thrust into a war with unicorns who were thought to be extinct many years before. She then had to train with a secret society of unicorn hunters to fight the venomous beasts who were out for vengeance. With her knowledge of how to fight unicorns she protected those she loved from the killer unicorns.

«When people think “unicorn” they think “my little pony” not “man eating creature born in blood” like the karkadann. But there are several types of unicorns» Diana Peterfreund stated.⁴⁶

6.2. UNICORNS IN THE AMERICAN FILM INDUSTRY | CLAUDETTE JEREZ

The image of the unicorn was a very successful theme in the American film industry during the 1980s. In this paper we shall analyze the most famous movies.

THE LAST UNICORN (1982)

In the movie rendition of *The Last Unicorn*, like the book, a female unicorn learns from a butterfly that she is the last of her kind on Earth. She goes on a journey to discover why, realizing it is because of human greed, cruelty and, ignorance that unicorns have died out.

A recurring theme in the movie is memory. As the protagonist reaches the King of the lands she is turned into a human to protect herself from danger and she must not forget who she really is. Though unicorns are a species that do not exist, the fact that human cruelty and greed has caused the extinction of many species is known throughout the world. The fact that people must remember who they are, no matter what happens, is also a relevant theme for the movie. The movie's morality issues cause the unicorn to be a symbol of regret.

BLADE RUNNER (1982)

The symbolism of the unicorn in this movie is to blur the lines between reality and imaginary. The unicorn is a recurring theme in *Blade Runner* used to confuse the characters and the audience on who is a droid and who is human.

The protagonist is a robot who believes himself to be human. He dreams of a unicorn and though the dream is not clear to the audience at first, it is later on revealed that the dream was placed there by humans. His friend, who is a cop, gives him an origami unicorn to inform him of this revelation. Thus all this insinuates that he is a robot and not a real person.

⁴⁶ Retrieved on April 2013 from <http://www.dianapeterfreund.com/books/unicorns/research/>. The karkadann is a mythical creature from India and Persia, similar to a rhinoceros.

LEGEND (1985)

This is another Ridley Scott's film that uses the same unicorn scene from the Blade Runner dream sequence. According to this movie unicorns are safe from darkness and can only be found by the purest of mortals. Unicorns only understand the language of love and laughter. Here, the unicorns symbolize pureness and they "know no evil" as Jack (Tom Cruise) points out. Darkness is out to destroy the last two unicorns on Earth so that evil can take over the world.

OTHER FILMS

Several other movies were created on the same topic. Here we remember *Fantasia* (Walt Disney 1940), *Nico the Unicorn* (Graeme Campbell 1998, after Frank Sacks' book), *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's stone* (Chris Columbus 2001, after J.K. Rowling's novel) distributed by Warner Bros.

6.3. EDGAR TOLSON AND HIS UNICORN | EMANUELE TAVERNA

Edgar Tolson (1904-1984) was a folk artist from Kentucky whose art was influenced by Biblical history and nature. He worked as a carpenter and stonemason. He is best known for a series of sequential narrative carvings depicting the Fall of Man as in the book of Genesis. In addition, he was very fond of woodcarving oxen, bulls and horses as gifts for friends. He also liked unicorns which became one of his most popular subjects.⁴⁷

After suffering a stroke in 1957, Tolson became a full-time artist. He came to national attention thanks to the Grassroots Craftsmen, an event organized to help Appalachian craftsmen to sell their artworks.

In 1971 his works were included in the Festival of American Folklife produced by The Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage which is held every summer in Washington, D.C.

Professor Michael Hall, University of Kentucky, also wanted Tolson's works in 1973 Biennial of the Whitney Museum of American Art in order to show young and less-known artists' artworks.

⁴⁷ Artists' profile – Edgar Tolson. Foundation for self-taught artists. Retrieved April 17, 2013, from <http://foundationstart.org/artists/edgar-tolson>.



Fig. 6.1. *Unicorn in a Garden* (1972) by Edgar Tolson, New York, American Folk Art Museum. Poplar with popsicle sticks, cedar, glue, pencil, leather, and nails (retrieved from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)



Fig. 6.2. *Unicorn Chained to an Apple Tree* (1970s) by Edgar Tolson, Private collection. Carved wood, leather collar (retrieved from <http://commons.wikimedia.org>)

Tolson thought that the unicorn existed. He said: “You know, I’d really like to see one some day, but I think that they keep ’em all over Europe.”

According to critics his “unicorn carving suggested the persistence of wonder and magic.”

6.4. COLLECTING UNICORNS | ELISA LANZA

The spread of the mania of unicorn collecting in the US recently brought Deirdre Pontbriand, a student at Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum (New York), to devote her master thesis to the exploration of the unicorn as a collectible object.⁴⁸ This topic in her work covers a considerable time span (from the Renaissance to the early twenty-first century) and a wide geographical area (much of Europe and the United States).

According to the author, the origin of “unicorn collecting” can be traced back to the 12th century, when the circulation of narwhal tusks through the European market corroborated the development of the myth of the unicorn. These long, spiraled horns were indeed interpreted as unicorns’ horns and collected as precious items in the emerging European collections of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁴⁸ Pontbriand 2008.

Objects featuring unicorns are still collected today in the form of figurines or wall art, in Europe as well as in the US. While in the previous centuries collecting was an activity exclusive of wealthy and acculturated people, after the rise of consumer culture in the twentieth century it became a popular custom in Europe and North America. The unicorns therefore shifted from high to popular culture and became objects of kitsch. Nowadays collectors acquire small unicorns made from any material (ceramic, crystal, fabric, glass, metal, plaster, plastic, and wood), stuffed reproductions, jewelry, pencils, stickers, stamps, coins, books, comics, cards, posters, pillows, and several other objects featuring unicorns.

The popularity of the unicorn as a collectible object in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is connected to objects which do not carry an intrinsic value, but rather represent something known to be imaginary. Collectors interviewed by Pontbriand stated that they liked unicorns because they are beautiful, radiant, graceful, mystical, magical or healing. Some collectors were intrigued with their beauty and mystery.⁴⁹ Others believed that unicorns symbolize beauty, purity, and the invisible world or that they are guardians or protectors. The unicorns seem to offer an escape from everyday life and free access into a fairy-tale world. These collectors actually collected the imaginary representations of their objects.

Evidence of the ongoing success of the image of the unicorn is provided by the wide affluence of audience to two important exhibitions recently arranged in New York City: *Mythic Creatures: Dragons, Unicorns, and Mermaids* (American Museum of Natural History, 2007) and *Search for the Unicorn* (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013).

⁴⁹ Pontbriand 2008, 80.

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INTRODUCTION | THE PATH OF THE UNICORN. THE IMAGE THROUGH THE ARTS

This exhibition explores the depiction of the unicorn from its creation up to today. First imagined in ancient times, the unicorn reached its peak in popularity during the Middle Ages in connection to the tale of the Virgin and the unicorn. Today, the unicorn is recognized by cultures around the world.

The Exhibition begins with the history of the unicorn in the town of Vinovo, being represented in the city's Coat of Arms. The mosaic, depicting the St. John International University logo with the unicorn, was manufactured by the students according to the ancient techniques illustrated in the related panel. The path of the unicorn iconography is explored from ancient artifacts to Medieval bestiaries. In the Renaissance, the unicorn is represented in two series of tapestries, displayed in a circular order to recall their placement at the Musée de Cluny in Paris. The students examined then the modern expression of the image through painting, stamps, films, and views in American culture. Returning to the Ancient artworks, the exhibition closes with the sacred animals that can be found in Egyptian art, which are just as unique as the unicorn.

The students and teachers of Art History, Studies in Art History, Museum Education, Film Studies, American Culture, Italian, and History of Ancient Egypt at SJIU carried out research for this exhibition throughout the Spring 2013 Semester.

The Coat of Arms of Vinovo

Gervasio Cambiano, Alessia Fassone, Estelle Rémy

L'ANTICO STEMMA DI VINOVO era in origine diverso da quello che conosciamo oggi. Infatti, prima era rappresentato dalla Croce Savoia con la V di Vinovo al centro. Nel maggio 1917, il Consiglio Comunale di Vinovo deliberò di creare un nuovo emblema della città, in ricordo della famiglia dei Marchesi Romagnano, che anticamente avevano regnato a lungo su questo territorio. Lo stemma attualmente ha un fondo blu, con un unicorno argentato nel mezzo, con un collare d'oro. Il tutto, sormontato da una corona turrata e decorato con due rami di pino dai frutti dorati, è accompagnato dalla legenda « Vicus Novus » (il borgo nuovo). La sola immagine dipinta dello stemma realizzata all'epoca sulla facciata del Palazzo Civico è



Fig. 1: Lo stemma di Vinovo creato nel 1917

stata distrutta durante il bombardamento aereo del 1941. Tuttavia, questo stesso emblema resta ancora oggi il simbolo della città.

THE ANCIENT COAT OF ARMS of Vinovo was in origin different from that we know today. In fact, before it was represented by the Savoy Cross with the V for Vinovo in the middle. In May 1917, the Town Council of Vinovo deliberated to create a new emblem of the city in memory of Marquises Romagnano's family, that anciently had reigned for a long time on this territory. Currently the coat of arms has a blue background, with a silver unicorn in the middle, with a gold collar. This is surmounted by a towered crown and decorated with two branches of pine with gilded fruits and accompanied by the legenda "Vicus Novus" (the new village). The only one painted image of the coat of arms drawn at that time on the façade of the Town Hall has been destroyed during the aerial bombing of the 1941. Nevertheless, it still remains as a symbol of the City.

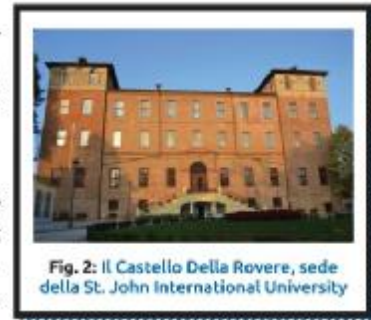


Fig. 2: Il Castello Della Rovere, sede della St. John International University

L'ANCIENE EMBLEME DE VINOVO à l'origine était différent de celui que nous connaissons aujourd'hui. En effet, avant il était représenté par la croix de Savoie et du « V » de Vinovo. Mais en mai 1917, le Conseil Communal de Vinovo a décidé de créer un nouveau blason de la ville, qui rappelait la famille qui avait le plus longtemps régné sur le territoire, les Marquis de Romagnano. Le blason est donc actuellement bleu, avec une licorne couleur argent portant un collier or. L'emblème est surmonté par une couronne crénelée et décoré par deux branches de pin aux fruits d'or, et accompagné par la légende « Vicus Novus » (le village neuf). La seule peinture du blason réalisée à l'époque sur la façade de l'Hôtel de Ville a été détruite pendant le bombardement aérien de 1941. Toutefois, ce même blason reste encore aujourd'hui le symbole de la ville.



7.2. A) MOSAIC DEPICTING THE SJIU LOGO | KACI FERGUSON, AMBER FRAZIER,
JOHNNY HILL



Ancient Mosaic Technique

Amber Frazier

SINCE ITS LIKELY ORIGINS IN Uru and Uruk, ancient mosaic technique has grown and developed over the centuries. In the beginning, mosaics were created using inspiration from natural pebble placement on the seaside. These pebbles were placed in courtyards to create brilliant geometric designs. Not only were the floors beautiful, they were very practical. These floors were waterproof and extremely durable.

Over time, the pebbles became much smaller and colored. Eventually, the Greeks adopted the technique and implemented tesserae. These were small stones cut into square pieces. These tesserae al-



Fig. 2: Glass and stone mosaic, Musée de Saint-Romain-en-Gal

lowed the mosaics to become much more neat and detailed. The mosaics in Greece became very elaborate and expensive.

When the Romans began making mosaics, they wanted to use them mainly for their functionality. Mosaics were a great solution to floor

covering, and they became a normal addition to homes. The simple monochrome designs did not require as much work and money as the previous Greek mosaics. Later, glass tesserae were introduced. They were perfect for curved and humid areas, like baths, and were also adopted on vertical surfaces. The glass tesserae had a brilliant shine and a greater variety of colors than the previous ones of stone, terracotta, and marble.

Byzantine mosaics displayed a large amount of gold tesserae. Typically, the entire background was gold. The figures displayed were also frontal and rigid. Over time, the use of gold tesserae died off. The mosaics became much more realistic and were comparable to the best of paintings. Eventually, gold tesserae were reintroduced.



Fig. 1: Pebble mosaic, Pella



Fig. 3: Glass mosaic, Museum of Byzantine Art

The Unicorn's Anatomy Through Art

Johnny Hill

THE UNICORN HAS SEEN A transformation over the ages that reflects both the geographical and chronological journey it has taken through society. The intent of this research is to analyze the changes in anatomy the unicorn has undergone over the many centuries since its creation.

The origin of the unicorn is unknown; however, the first artistic example comes from the ancient Indus civilization (who lived near modern-day India). From this culture come a set of stone amulets, used to make unique impressions on wax document seals. Some of these seals featured bull-like animals with long necks and a single long, curved horn from its forehead. This was, in essence, the first unicorn.

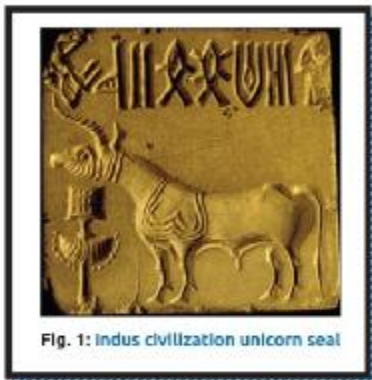


Fig. 1: Indus civilization unicorn seal

Slowly, the legend of this one-horned creature made its way into Persia and the Near East, where it was picked up by the Greek writer Ctesias. In his book *Indica* (398 BC), he wrote of the unicorn as a "wild ass" as big as a horse. It was white but had a red head, and its long horn was red, white, and black in three different parts. This fantastic animal may have been the combination of a rhinoceros, wild ass, and Tibetan antelope (which has two long, straight horns).

Ctesias' writing introduced the idea of the unicorn into Western culture, but it took many centuries to become a motif of Western art. When the world saw the rise of Christianity, the unicorn was already present in literature. So as it became a symbol for Christ himself, it was of course assimilated into the sacred artwork of the early centuries AD. The first emergence of the unicorn in Western art was in a Byzantine church mosaic. At this point, the unicorn took a very goat-like form, including its goat tail and cleft hooves. Its horn varied in size and shape, and was often white.



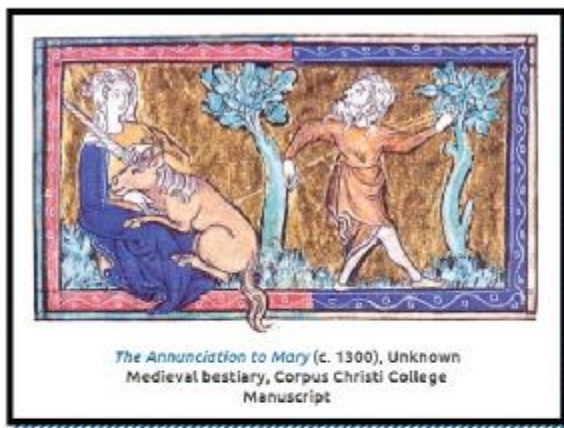
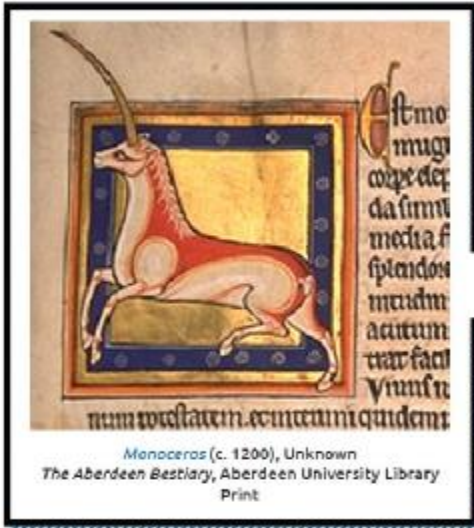
Fig. 2: 13th century floor mosaic featuring a goat-like unicorn, Basilica di San Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna

Throughout the paintings and sculpture of the Middle Ages, the unicorn remained fairly consistent: its body was always that of either a goat or horse, and it was becoming more unanimously white. Its horn was now always straight and spiraled (modeled after the rare narwhal tusks that were believed to be unicorn horns).

By the 16th or 17th century, the unicorn developed into the animal we know today. Used in coats of arms and other symbolic art, the unicorn became a beast of wisdom, pride, strength, and purity. Its anatomy has stayed relatively the same for hundreds of years – but maybe this legend will continue to change, as it has since its creation.



The Unicorn in Medieval Bestiaries



*This is a collection of unicorn drawings from the bestiaries (books that catalogued the world's known animals) of the Middle Ages. The images are arranged in chronological order, as represented by the arrows.

The Unicorn Tapestries

Lindsay Wold

THE UNICORN HAS BEEN AN ever-present mythical creature interwoven into the art production from medieval manuscripts and tapestries to modern graphic design. Tapestries remain one of the best examples of the art that filled the medieval art production. The intricate patterns and rich colors woven together filled the walls of the stone structures that were built throughout modern Europe. The subject matter that was woven varied, and in the case of depicting the mythical unicorn, two series of tapestries have been found.

The Hunt of the Unicorn

The first series of tapestries executed, *The Hunt of the Unicorn*, was woven between 1495 and 1505. Originating under the hands of a weaver from Netherlands, this series of seven different tapestries were woven with materials such as wool, silk, and metallic threads. This combination of materials is one of the reasons for the vibrancy in color that still remains when viewed today. The seven tapestries have always been recorded as being shown together, firstly commissioned for the home of the French nobles, the La Rouchefoucauld family.



Fig. 1: *The Hunters Enter the Forest*

Each of the seven tapestries shows a moment in time through the process of the hunt for the unicorn. This series depicts a set of noblemen who are working alongside a group of hunters in pursuit of the unicorn. The series presents the progression of the hunt as it takes place.

The first tapestry (fig. 1) in the series depicts the point where the hunters enter the woods in search of the unicorn. Hunting was viewed as a noble activity, and the noblemen were commonly presented enjoying this activity in various factions of art production. In this tapestry the hunters are shown surrounded by a thick setting of greenery, with the artist using the stylistic traits of *horror vacui*, or the process of covering the whole surface

of the image with patterns and imagery. There is a forward motion that fills the bodies of the men depicted as well as the examples of canine that are guiding the hunters to the unicorn.

The moment where the unicorn is found in the act of resting next to a fountain is the subject of the second tapestry in the series (fig. 2). Surrounded by examples of exotic animals, the unicorn lies unaware of the hunters that are viewing, partially masked by the greenery of the forest that has been trekked through. The hunters are caught in the act of discussion, assuming they are plotting the plan of capture. The figure of the unicorn carries the anatomical makeup of a horse to the spectator, almost appearing far from unique, until the horn is recognized, almost blending in to the water that is flowing from the fountain.

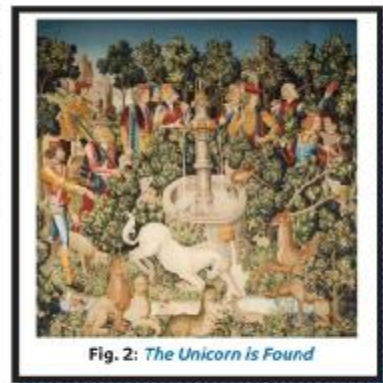


Fig. 2: *The Unicorn is Found*



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The Unicorn Tapestries

Lindsay Wold

The moment of attack taken out on the sought after unicorn is the image presented in the third part of the series (fig. 3). This is the first view that the spectator receives of the unicorn, and it is a moment of complete chaos as the hunters are interwoven into the forest greenery alongside the hunting canine. A tree, bare of branches and leaves strikes through the center of the tapestry, as a way to create perspective in the scene. It contrasts alongside the spears held by the hunters against the horn of the unicorn. With all the vibrant colors and variations of expressions that fill the faces of the hunters, there is a sense of serenity that emerges from the white at the center of the tapestry, the image of the unicorn.



Fig. 3: *The Attack of the Unicorn*

The fourth tapestry (fig. 4) is a more aggressive moment, depicting the



Fig. 4: *The Unicorn Attacks Back*

unicorn fighting back as it tries to escape the clutches of the hunters. The use of perspective is far greater in this piece in comparison to the second, and the unicorn is portrayed in a more aggressive position of attack as the horn pierces the canine at the left side of the tapestry. Depicting the unicorn in a sense of violence was not common in art because the fact that this creature would be capable of such actions took away from the beauty that was held within its mystic presence in a scene.

Despite the nature of this animal that had come out in the fourth tapestry, the fifth depicts the defeat of the unicorn and its procession to the castle to be given to the nobles. The unicorn is not the focal point of this tapestry, although it is the focus of the series. Instead the castle and those who are outside its gates to receive the unicorn take up the focus of this tapestry. The defeat of the unicorn is at the top left, and the eye of the unicorn gazes straight out to the spectator, unlike any of the other figures in the composition.

The Unicorn Tapestries

Lindsay Wold



Fig. 5: *The Unicorn is Killed and Brought to the Castle*

The sixth part of the series is the only tapestry that is not completely preserved. It remains in only two fragments, being entitled the *Mystic Capture of the Unicorn* (fig. 6). It is assumed that this piece is the example of the nobles accepting the body of the unicorn from the hunters. We are lucky enough to have the unicorn present in one of the fragments. Showing a close view of the attack of a canine on the back of the unicorn and the distinct horn that symbolizes the unicorn. Above stands the female noble, who is recognized from the fifth portion of the series. She holds her left hand up as a matter of receiving the offering of the capture.

In the last part of the *Hunt of the Unicorn* series, the unicorn is seen alive once more, enclosed in a cage (fig. 7). It is the sole representation



Fig. 6: *Portion of The Mystic Capture of the Unicorn*

of the unicorn in this whole series, and also leads to one of the main interpretations of what the unicorn represents in art. Viewed alone, with no other animals or figures of hunters and nobles present, the unicorn, considered being a resurrected being, recalls the rebirth of Christ. The unicorn is something treasured and valued, but there are some who choose to pursue, attack, and kill the precious figure. After it is presented as being destroyed in the castle of the rulers, the mystic creature reincarnates and is in what seems to be another world.



Fig. 7: *The Unicorn in Captivity*

The Unicorn Tapestries

Lindsay Wold

The Lady and the Unicorn

A second series of tapestries that were woven at the end of the 15th century also show the image of the unicorn (Figs. 8-13). This series of six tapestries was woven in the Netherlands as well, and are specifically linked to drawings that were found in Paris from the same time. Woven with wool and silk, the tapestries are considered to have been as vibrant as *The Hunt of the Unicorn* series, but have not been under such strict preservation policies.

tains the unicorn juxtaposed to a noble female as well as examples of other exotic animals. The unicorn is placed to the lady's left in all six tapestries in the series. The image of a lion flanks her right side, always giving a sense of a frame and focus on the lady and the gestures that determine the link to the allegories of the five senses. In the tapestry representing touch, the lady interacts with the unicorn, specifically touching the horn.

The horn of the unicorn was considered to be something of great value to the nobles of Medieval Europe. If one could be obtained it was considered to bring a magical quality to the lives of the owners. The tapestry that is titled *Desire* is the widest of the six tapestries, and the final piece in the series. Woven with the inscription "À Mon Seul Désir," which is roughly translated to "according to my lone desire," this piece signifies love, and the passions that can be created by the other five senses. In this series, the unicorn remains the object of nobility, but is not the focus of the six tapestries. The presence is significant to note due to the consistent positioning and the importance it must have held to the commissioner, a nobleman from the court of King Charles VII. The pennants that are shown in all six of the tapestries bear the coat of arms that represents this nobleman, Jean le Viste.



Fig. 8: *Sight*

Five of the tapestries are considered to be depicting the five senses, with the final representing the allegory of desire. Each of the tapestries con-



Fig. 9: *Taste*

The Unicorn Tapestries

Lindsay Wold



Fig. 10: *Touch*



Fig. 11: *Smell*



Fig. 12: *Hearing*



Fig. 13: *Desire*

The Maiden and the Unicorn

Kaci Ferguson

THE DEPICTION OF THE MAIDEN and the unicorn was first popularized during the Middle Ages. According to legend, the only way a unicorn could be captured was through the help of a maiden. The virgin girl would be left alone in a forest or garden where a unicorn had previously been spotted. The unicorn would then go up to the maiden for refuge and fall asleep on her lap. This left the animal in a venerable position, which allowed the hunters to easily capture and kill it.

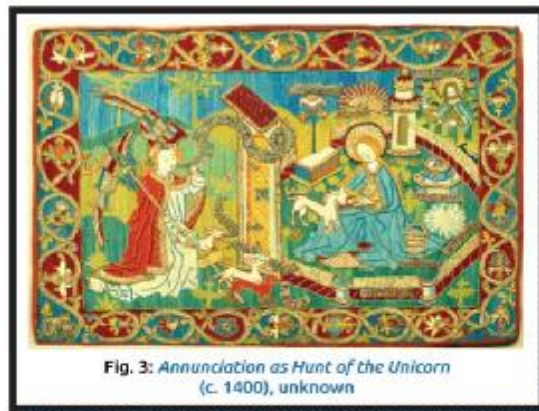
Many of the earliest depictions of the maiden and the unicorn were in medieval bestiaries, a collection of what were believed at the time to



be existing animals. They accompanied contemporary descriptions of the animals and moral stories involving them.

Later, the tale of the virgin and the unicorn became a symbol for the Passion of the Christ in Christianity. The unicorn symbolized Jesus, the

hunting party symbolized the archangel Gabriel, and the maiden became a symbol of the Virgin Mary. Depictions of the virgin and the unicorn also symbolized the Annunciation. Females were occasionally painted with unicorns in order to accentuate that they were chaste.



The Unicorn in 15th Century Painting



The Triumph of Battista Sforza (Detail) (1472)
Piero della Francesca
Florence, Uffizi Gallery
Oil on panel (47 x 33 cm)



Allegory of March - Triumph of Minerva and Sign of Aries
(1476-1484), Francesco del Cossa
Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia
Fresco (216 x 320 cm)



The Mystic Hunt of the Unicorn Representing Annunciation
(1489), Circle of Martin Schongauer
Moscow, Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts
Oil on panel (51 x 57 cm)



Triumph of Chastity (c. 1480-1485), Jacopo del Sellaio
Fiesole, Museo Bandini
Tempera on Panel (76 x 86.5 cm)

The Unicorn in 16th Century Painting



The Garden of Earthly Delights (detail) (1480-1505)
Hieronymus Bosch
Madrid, Prado Museum
Oil on panel (220 x 390 cm)



Unicorn (Monoceros) (1551), Conrad Gesner
Historiae Animalium
Print



A Girl with a Unicorn (1531-1532)
Romanino Trenta, Castello del Buonconsiglio
Fresco (detail)



The Young Lady with the Unicorn
(1506), Raphael
Rome, Galleria Borghese
Oil on panel (65 x 51 cm)



Saint Justina with the Unicorn (c. 1530-1534)
Moretto da Brescia
Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum
Oil on panel (200 x 139 cm)



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*This is a collection of paintings from the 16th century depicting various forms of the unicorn. The images are arranged in chronological order, as represented by the arrows.

The Unicorn in Stamps



*This is a collection of unicorn stamps from across the world. The images are arranged in chronological order, as represented by the arrows.

7.14. THE UNICORN IN AMERICAN CULTURE | SILVIA DUCHI, CLAUDETTE JEREZ, RACHEL STRONG, EMANUELE TAVERNA, STEFANO CROTTA, STEFANO GEMELLO, JOHN FRIGNOCCA

The Unicorn in American Culture

Silvia Duchi, Claudette Jerez, Rachel Strong, Emanuele Taverna, Stefano Crotta, Stefano Gemello, John Frignocca

PROBABLY BROUGHT TO THE New World through European heraldry, the unicorn often appears in modern American culture. In art, literature, and the film industry, this imaginary creature evokes magic as well as fantastic worlds of pureness. On the other hand, the unicorn is sometimes interpreted by popular culture as a figure of parody, even a trivial element.

American Fantasy Fiction

In *The Last Unicorn*, author Peter S. Beagle takes you on the journey of a unicorn, who discovers that she may be the last of her kind. She embarks on a quest with a magician to King Haggard's castle to find the other unicorns. They are attacked by a red bull that belongs to King Haggard. The King admits he has all the other unicorns trapped. Determined to free her species, the unicorn drives the bull into the ocean and saves the others.



Fig. 1: *The Last Unicorn*, by P. S. Beagle

Unicorns in the American Film Industry

In the movie rendition of *The Last Unicorn*, like the book, a female unicorn learns from a butterfly that a demonic red bull has gathered all of her kind, hiding them. She goes on a journey to discover why, realizing it is because of human greed, cruelty, and ignorance that unicorns were trapped.



Fig. 2: *The Last Unicorn*, movie

Blade Runner

The symbolism the unicorn has in the movie is to blur the lines between reality and fantasy. The unicorn is a recurring theme found in *Blade Runner*, used to confuse the characters as well as the audience on who is a droid and who is human (Fig. 3).



Fig. 3: Origami unicorn in *Blade Runner*

Edgar Tolson and His Unicorn

Edgar Tolson (1904-1984) was a folk artist from Kentucky whose art was influenced by Biblical history and nature. He is best known for a series of sequential narrative carvings depicting the fall of man as in the Book of *Genesis*. In addition, he was very fond of woodcarving oxen, bulls and horses as gifts for friends. He also liked unicorns, which became one of his most popular subjects (Fig. 4). He said: "You know, I'd really like to see one some day, but I think they keep'em all over there in Europe." According to critics, "the unicorn carving suggested the persistence of wonder and magic."



Fig. 4: Edgar Tolson, unicorn carving



The Unicorn in Films

Amber Frazier, Johnny Hill, Claudette Jerez, Valerie Ramage

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone (2001)

In this film, the unicorn is the most pure being on the entire planet. They hide out in the Forbidden Forest near Hogwarts. The unicorn in this film offers a second chance at life, but at a terrible cost. Their blood can keep anyone alive, no matter how close they are to death. However, once someone drinks the blood of a unicorn, their life is cursed. This signifies the cost of killing something so innocent and defenseless. The villain in the film, Voldemort, kills several unicorns and drinks their blood in order to stay alive, but it causes him to wither away and survive as a parasite on another man.

Legend (1985)

This is a Ridley Scott film (that, oddly enough, uses the same unicorn scene as Scott's film *Blade Runner*). According to this movie, unicorns are safe from darkness and



Fig. 2: Unicorn and characters from *Legend*



Fig. 1: Unicorn in *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*

can only be found by the purest of mortals. Unicorns only understand the language of love and laughter. Here, the unicorns symbolize pureness and they "know no evil" as Jack (Tom Cruise) points out. Darkness is out to destroy the last two unicorns on Earth so that evil can take over the world.

Bitter Business (2013)

The unicorn in this SJIU student-produced short movie coincides with the legend of the maiden and the unicorn. Although the gender roles are reversed, the protagonist in *Bitter Business* is a metaphor for the maiden. In the early legends of the unicorn, it was said that the mythical creature would only approach a virgin maiden, and was

unable to be captured otherwise. However, once it was lured in by the maiden, hunters could attack the beast and slay it. The antagonist in *Bitter Business* lures in the "unicorn" by holding the protagonist hostage. His sister then brings the unicorn to his abductor, giving the hostage freedom but giving up the unicorn.

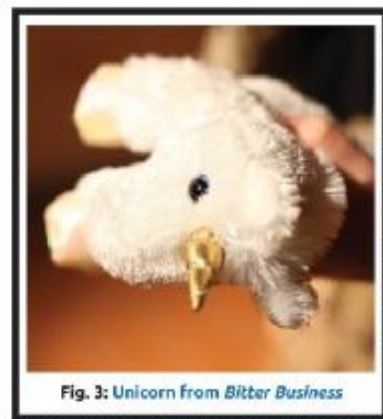


Fig. 3: Unicorn from *Bitter Business*



Sacred Animals in Ancient Egypt

Korby Boswell, Alessia Fassone



Fig. 1: Geese painting from the Tomb of Nefermaat at Maydum

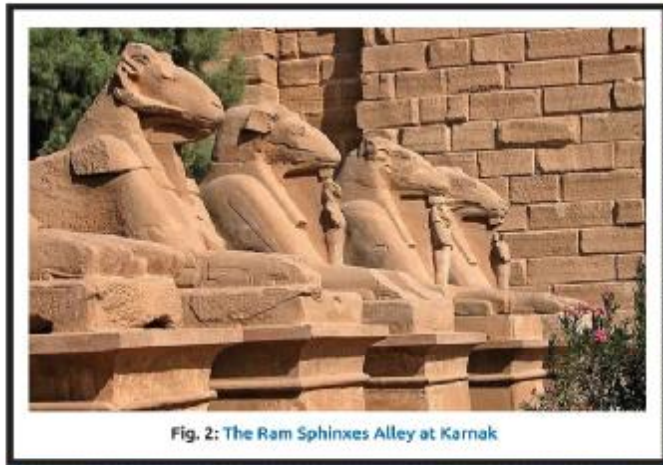


Fig. 2: The Ram Sphinxes Alley at Karnak

IN ANCIENT EGYPT, MANY ANIMALS were considered sacred, since they were thought to be the incarnation of deities. As far as creation goes, according to the myth, many animals played a part. It is said that **Geb**, who was depicted as a **goose**, laid a "cosmic egg" which gave birth to the sun and the world.

Significantly different than creation, **Anubis** was a **jackal-headed** god of mummification and guiding individuals through the afterlife. Many believed that Anubis watched over the dead and helped in the process of mummification, in which priests sometimes wore masks of Anubis.



Fig. 3: Anubis as a guardian in the Tomb of Tutankhamun

In ancient Egypt, the **ram** was a symbol of the god **Khnum**. The ram was depicted as a very fertile animal, thus insinuating creation since legend states that Khnum created the bodies of human children and placed them into mother's wombs.

As a god of creation, rebirth, and the movement of the sun, **Khepri** was represented by a **scarab beetle**. Scarab beetles lay their eggs in a ball of dung and roll it along the ground until the young beetles hatch. The creator god Khepri was believed to have come out of thin air.



Fig. 4: The solar scarab sailing on the boat of the Sun god Ra

Sacred Animals in Ancient Egypt

Stefano Crotta, Kaci Ferguson

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT sacred animals was the **bull Hapis**, which was related to fertility and wealth, two aspects essential for agriculture.

To be identified as a bull Hapis, the animal must have precise characteristics: a black body with a white triangle upon its forehead; a white vulture wing outline on its back; a scarab mark under its tongue; a white crescent moon shape on its right flank; and double hairs on its tail. Once found, this bull was brought to a temple and used as an oracle. When a Hapis bull died it was mummified and buried in a stone sarcophagus. Only after its death the research of a new bull Hapis could begin.



Fig. 1: The Hapis Bull from the Serapeion of Alexandria

Hathor was the goddess of fertility, her most common manifestation on earth was as a **cow**, and she was commonly depicted as a cow goddess with head horns in which is set a sun disk with Uraeus.



Fig. 2: Hathor, Mistress of the West

Hathor was considered to be the "Mother of Mothers," as she was the goddess of women, fertility, children and childbirth. She was also the goddess of beauty, joy, love, romance, perfume, dance, and music.

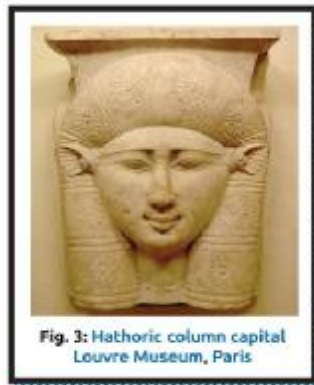


Fig. 3: Hathoric column capital
Louvre Museum, Paris



Fig. 4: Bastet bronze statue
Louvre Museum, Paris

Bastet was depicted as a woman with the head of a **cat**. The name Bastet probably means "she of the ointment jar," because she was associated with perfume. She was also associated with motherhood because cats have many kittens and tend to be protective of them.

Bastet was the local goddess of Bubastis, which held a large festival in her honor every year. Women danced and sang. Cats were highly admired in ancient Egypt because they combat the vermin problem. In Bubastis, families would often embalm their deceased cats and bury them in the city's temple.



Fig. 5: Mother cat with kittens
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Wien

Sacred Animals in Ancient Egypt

Majda Benfaida, Korby Boswell, Valerie Ramage, Rachel Strong

SOBEK WAS THE ANCIENT GOD of the **crocodiles**, and was credited to be the creator of the world who rose from the water and created order in the universe. Sobek also brought fertility to the Nile. He was credited as the protector and symbolized the strength and speed of the Pharaoh, and because of his ferocity he was also considered the patron of the army.

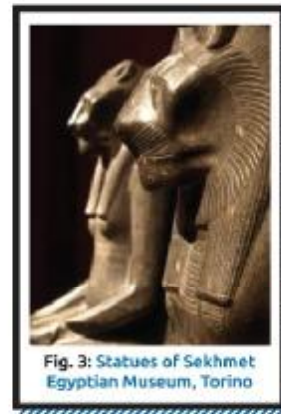


Sobek is depicted as a crocodile, mummified crocodile, or a man with a crocodile head. When he is depicted as the man he is usually wearing a headdress with a horned sun disc. Sobek had many different wives and children depending on the regional myth, and in Ptolemaic and Roman periods there was a temple built for Sobek that he also shared with Horus, at Kom Ombo.

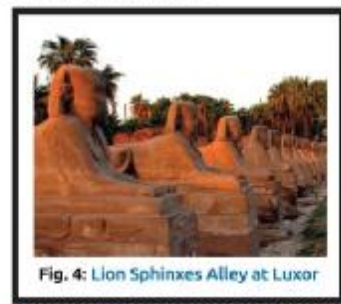


Baboons hold an interesting and mysterious role in Egyptian mythology, because they were associated with **Thoth**, the god of wisdom, science, and measurement. Baboons were depicted on the scales which weighed and judged the heart of the deceased. Thoth was also the patron of the scribes. The baboon was not only a symbol of the moon god, but they were also a symbol of the sun god Re. Baboons had a habit of screeching at daybreak and warming themselves in the morning sun. Because of this, baboons were often painted with their arms raised to the sun.

In Egyptian mythology, **Sekhmet** was the warrior goddess as well as goddess of healing for Upper Egypt, depicted as a **lion-headed woman**. According to myth, she was daughter of the sun god Ra. Her name comes from the word *sekhem*, "the powerful one."



The famous **Sphinx** in Giza is characterized by having the body of a lion and a human head, made of limestone. The lion was known as a solar symbol in several ancient cultures. The head of a Pharaoh and the body of a lion symbolize power and might, since the pharaoh was the ruler of cosmic order.



 <p>ST. JOHN INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY</p>	<p>L'UNICORNO NELL'ARTE</p> <p>UN PERCORSO ESTETICO E FILOSOFICO</p>	 <p>Associazione Amici del Castello</p>
	<p>Mostra realizzata dagli studenti della St John International University</p> <p>in collaborazione con</p> <p>Associazione Amici del Castello</p> <p>A cura di: Elisa Lanza Lindsay Wold</p> <p>Grafica: Johnny Hill</p>	
<p>Inaugurazione 11 Luglio 2013 - ore 18.30</p> <p>Ala Comunale Don Donadio Piazza G. Marconi - Vinovo (TO)</p> <p>Apertura: giovedì 11 dalle 18.30 alle 23.00 venerdì 12, sabato 13, domenica 14 dalle 16.00 alle 19.00</p>		
<p>Con il patrocinio del Comune di Vinovo</p>		<p>Informazioni: 338-2313951</p>

INTRODUZIONE - IL PERCORSO DELL'UNICORNO: L'IMMAGINE ATTRAVERSO LE ARTI | ELISA LANZA

La mostra indaga l'iconografia dell'unicorno dalla sua creazione ai giorni nostri. Sin dalla prima comparsa nell'antichità, la figura dell'unicorno incontrò un grande successo che raggiunse il culmine nel Medioevo in relazione alla leggenda della Vergine e l'unicorno. L'immagine è tuttora presente in diverse culture in tutto il mondo.

La mostra si apre con la storia dell'unicorno effigiato nello stemma del Comune di Vinovo. Il mosaico, che raffigura invece il logo con l'unicorno della St. John International University, è stato realizzato dagli studenti seguendo le tecniche antiche illustrate nel relativo pannello. Viene quindi seguito il percorso dell'iconografia dell'unicorno dai manufatti antichi ai bestiari medievali.

Nel Rinascimento, l'animale fantastico compare in due serie di arazzi, qui disposti con un andamento circolare che richiama l'allestimento degli originali presso il Musée de Cluny a Parigi.

Gli allievi hanno infine esaminato le moderne espressioni dell'immagine in pittura, filatelia, cinema e nella cultura americana. La mostra si chiude con un ritorno ai reperti antichi, illustrando gli animali sacri nell'antico Egitto, che ricoprirono un ruolo unico, proprio come l'unicorno.

Nel corso dello Spring Semester 2013, hanno contribuito alla realizzazione della mostra allievi e docenti dei corsi di Storia dell'Arte, Studi di Storia dell'Arte, Museologia, Storia del Cinema, Cultura Americana, Italiano e Storia dell'Antico Egitto.

8.1. PANNELLO 1 – LO STEMMA DI VINOVO | ALESSIA FASSONE

L'analisi storica ed iconografica dello stemma del Comune di Vinovo è stata l'oggetto del lavoro finale della studentessa Estelle Rémy per il corso di Beginning Italian I con la prof.ssa Alessia Fassone, grazie dalle informazioni gentilmente fornite dal sig. Gervasio Cambiano.

La storia dell'emblema ha evidenziato lo stretto legame tra la città e la famiglia Della Rovere che dominava su questo territorio. Non è casuale che il simbolo distintivo di Vinovo, l'unicorno, sia anche il logo della St. John International University, ospitata nel castello cittadino ed edificato proprio da questa dinastia di governatori.

In antico, lo stemma di Vinovo era costituito dalla Croce di Savoia (croce bianca in campo rosso) inquadrata in una cornice ovale e sormontata da una corona, con al centro una V. Di questo antico blasone si conserva un solo esempio, sulla facciata della chiesa cimiteriale di Vinovo, ed esso era forse completato da un collare (probabilmente quello dell'Ordine Mauriziano) intrecciato con rami di quercia o di rovere.

Nel maggio 1917, il Consiglio Comunale decise di adottare un nuovo stemma, che ricordasse l'antica storia delle famiglie nobiliari che in passato avevano regnato sulla città: da ricerche d'archivio emerse che il territorio era stato governato per lungo tempo dai Marchesi Romagnano (intorno al X-XI secolo), che avevano come blasone una composizione con due unicorni rampanti che sorreggono uno scudo con un elmo, da cui sorge un terzo unicorno, che regge tra le zampe un ramo fruttato.

Si adotta perciò l'immagine dell'unicorno rampante, color argento, su campo blu; sopra è posta una corona turrata e sotto un intreccio di rami di pino e la legenda "Vicus Novus". Attualmente, nell'emblema ufficiale del Comune, l'unicorno è di color oro su campo blu, ed è completato da rami di alloro e di quercia: i colori e le piante sono caratteristici dell'altra famiglia regnante sulla città nel periodo del XVI-XVII secolo, i Della Rovere. Uno dei rappresentanti di questa dinastia divenne Papa con il nome di Giulio II e nel suo stemma pontificale, infatti, spiccano sia il rovere sia i due colori distintivi.

8.2. PANNELLO 2 – LA TECNICA DEL MOSAICO ANTICO | AMBER FRAZIER (TRAD. F. CATALANO)

La tecnica del mosaico antico si è sviluppata attraverso i secoli, a partire dalle sue probabili origini presso Ur e Uruk (Mesopotamia). In principio, i mosaici erano creati ispirandosi al naturale posizionamento dei ciottoli sulla spiaggia. Questi ciottoli erano disposti nei cortili per creare gradevoli disegni geometrici. I pavimenti non erano soltanto belli, erano anche molto funzionali. Queste superfici erano infatti impermeabili ed estremamente durevoli.

Fig. 1: mosaico in ciottoli, Pella.

Con il passare del tempo, furono utilizzati ciottoli molto più piccoli e colorati. Infine, i Greci rielaborarono la tecnica mediante l'invenzione delle tessere, ovvero piccole pietre tagliate a cubetti. Le tessere permettevano la realizzazione di mosaici molto più nitidi e dettagliati, sicché nell'antica Grecia i mosaici divennero molto elaborati e costosi.

I Romani cominciarono a realizzare mosaici prevalentemente per la loro funzionalità. I mosaici costituivano infatti una soluzione particolarmente efficace per il rivestimento dei pavimenti e divennero un consueto arredo nelle case. A differenza dei mosaici greci, i semplici disegni monocromi non richiedevano molto lavoro né molta spesa. Successivamente, furono introdotte le tessere in vetro, ideali per superfici curve e umide, come le terme, e vennero adoperate anche su superfici verticali. Le tessere in vetro erano caratterizzate da una lucentezza brillante e da una varietà cromatica maggiore rispetto a quelle in pietra, terracotta o marmo.

Fig. 2: mosaico in vetro e pietre, Musée de Saint-Romain-en-Gal.

I mosaici bizantini mettono in mostra una gran quantità di tessere d'oro, soprattutto per quanto riguarda lo sfondo. Le figure erano raffigurate in posizione frontale e rigida. Col passare del tempo, l'utilizzo di tessere d'oro fu abbandonato. Le raffigurazioni musive divennero molto più realistiche, comparabili ai migliori esempi di pittura. Infine, furono nuovamente reintrodotte le tessere d'oro.

Fig. 3: mosaico in vetro, Museum of Byzantine Art.

8.3. PANNELLO 3 – L'ANATOMIA DELL'UNICORNO NELL'ARTE | JOHNNY HILL (TRAD. S. DUCHI)

Nel corso dei secoli la raffigurazione dell'unicorno ha subito numerose trasformazioni che riflettono diverse concezioni culturali. L'intento della presente ricerca è analizzare, a partire dalla sua concezione, l'evoluzione della struttura anatomica di questo animale immaginario nel corso delle epoche e in diverse aree geografiche.

Se l'origine dell'unicorno è di fatto sconosciuta, la sua rappresentazione più antica risale alla civiltà indù, in un territorio non lontano dall'attuale India. Prodotti di questa cultura sono una serie di amuleti utilizzati come sigilli. Su alcuni appaiono animali simili a tori, con lunghi colli e un corno arcuato sulla fronte: una conformazione che di fatto rappresenta una prima versione dell'unicorno.

Fig. 1: sigillo raffigurante un unicorno risalente alla civiltà indù.

Lentamente la leggenda di una creatura munita di un unico corno si diffuse in Persia e Medio Oriente e quindi in Grecia, dove venne trattata dallo scrittore Ctesia. Nella sua opera intitolata *Indica* (398 a.C.), Ctesia descrisse l'unicorno come un "asino selvatico" grande quanto un cavallo, bianco ma con la testa rossa, dotato di un lungo corno con una parte rossa, una bianca ed un'altra nera. Questo animale fantastico era una sorta di combinazione tra un rinoceronte, un asino selvatico e un'antilope tibetana (che però ha due corna lunghe e diritte).

Con l'opera di Ctesia l'unicorno entrò nella cultura occidentale; tuttavia solo dopo alcuni secoli se ne riscontrò la presenza anche nelle arti figurative. L'unicorno era comunque già presente in letteratura all'avvento del Cristianesimo e diventò il simbolo stesso di Cristo nei lavori artistici dei primi secoli della nostra era. Il primo esempio nell'arte occidentale risale al mosaico di una chiesa bizantina. In questa fase l'unicorno aveva assunto sembianze del tutto simili a quelle di una capra, inclusa la coda e gli zoccoli bipartiti. Il corno, che poteva variare nella forma e nella lunghezza, era spesso bianco.

Fig. 2: mosaico pavimentale del XIII secolo raffigurante un unicorno dalla conformazione caprina, Basilica di San Giovanni Evangelista, Ravenna.

In tutte le raffigurazioni del Medioevo, sia scultoree che pittoriche, l'anatomia dell'unicorno rimase sostanzialmente la stessa: il corpo simile a quello di una capra o di un cavallo di colore bianco con il corno sempre dritto e spiraliforme simile al dente dei narvali. Solo tra il XVI e il XVII secolo l'unicorno assunse la conformazione tramandata fino ai giorni nostri. La sua immagine, divenuta simbolo di saggezza, orgoglio, forza e purezza, veniva scolpita su armi e altri manufatti. La rappresentazione è rimasta sostanzialmente invariata per centinaia di anni, ma è possibile che la leggenda continui nella sua evoluzione, così come è avvenuto sin dalla sua nascita.

8.4. PANNELLO 4 – L'UNICORNO NEI BESTIARI MEDIEVALI | KACI FERGUSON (TRAD. S. DUCHI)

Fig. 1: *Monoceros* (1200 circa), autore sconosciuto.

Il bestiario di Aberdeen, Biblioteca Università di Aberdeen – stampa.

Fig. 2: *L'unicorno* (1230), autore sconosciuto.

Bestiario medievale, Biblioteca Nazionale del Regno Unito.

Inchiostro e pigmenti su pergamena (29.2 x 19.7 cm).

Fig. 3: *Come catturare un unicorno* (1235), autore sconosciuto.

Bestiario medievale, Biblioteca Nazionale del Regno Unito.

Inchiostro e pigmenti su pergamena (30.1 x 22.5 cm).

Fig. 4: *L'annunciazione a Maria* (1300 circa), autore sconosciuto.

Bestiario medievale, College Corpus Christi.

Manoscritto.

Le immagini di questo pannello sono tratte da bestiari medievali. I bestiari (bestiaria) sono testi medievali in cui sono raccolte le descrizioni di tutti gli animali conosciuti (reali o immaginari), a ciascuno dei quali è abbinata una qualità morale peculiare.

Le immagini sono disposte nell'ordine cronologico indicato dalle frecce.

8.5. PANNELLO 5 – GLI ARAZZI DELL'UNICORNO | LINDSAY WOLD (TRAD. E. LANZA)

L'unicorno è una creatura mitica da sempre interconnessa alla produzione artistica, a partire dai manoscritti e dagli arazzi medievali, per giungere sino alla grafica contemporanea. Gli arazzi costituiscono per certi versi uno dei migliori esempi di arte medievale. Intricati motivi decorativi riprodotti nel tessuto a colori vivaci ricoprivano strutture in pietra erette in tutta Europa. I soggetti erano disparati; nel caso del tema dell'unicorno, si conservano due distinte serie.

La Caccia all'unicorno.

La prima serie di arazzi, la *Caccia all'unicorno*, fu realizzata tra il 1495 e il 1505. Prodotta da un tessitore olandese, la serie, composta da sette arazzi, fu tessuta in lana, seta e fili metallici. Tale combinazione di materiali è uno dei motivi della vivacità dei colori, tuttora conservata. I sette arazzi, commissionati per la residenza dei nobili francesi della famiglia La Rouchefoucauld, sono sempre stati esposti insieme.

Ciascuno dei sette arazzi raffigura un momento dello sviluppo della caccia all'unicorno. La serie ritrae un gruppo di nobili che affiancano una squadra di cacciatori nell'inseguimento dell'unicorno. La sequenza mostra la progressione della caccia secondo le tappe del suo sviluppo.

Il primo arazzo (fig. 1) raffigura il momento in cui i cacciatori entrano nel bosco in cerca dell'unicorno. La caccia era considerata un'attività tipicamente nobiliare e, in diversi prodotti artistici, i nobili venivano usualmente ritratti intenti in tale attività. In questo arazzo i cacciatori sono rappresentati circondati da fitta vegetazione, dal momento che l'artista adotta i tratti stilistici del cosiddetto *horror vacui* ovvero il procedimento di coprire l'intera immagine con motivi decorativi e figurati. Un costante movimento in avanti pervade i corpi degli uomini rappresentati e dei cani che guidano i cacciatori verso l'unicorno.

Fig. 1: i cacciatori entrano nel bosco.

Il momento in cui l'unicorno viene infine trovato nell'atto di riposare presso una fontana è l'argomento del secondo arazzo (fig. 2). Circondato da esemplari di animali esotici, l'unicorno giace ignaro dei cacciatori che invece lo vedono, parzialmente mascherati dalla vegetazione che hanno attraversato. I cacciatori sono colti nell'atto di discutere, verosimilmente, una strategia per la cattura. Agli occhi dello spettatore, la figura dell'unicorno presenta la stessa conformazione anatomica di un cavallo, finché non si rivela la presenza del corno, quasi fuso con l'acqua che sgorga dalla fontana.

Fig. 2: l'unicorno viene trovato.

8.6. PANNELLO 6 – GLI ARAZZI DELL'UNICORNO | LINDSAY WOLD (TRAD. E. LANZA)

Nella terza parte della serie è raffigurato il momento dell'attacco all'unicorno (fig. 3). Questa è per lo spettatore la prima visione vera e propria dell'unicorno ed avviene in un momento di pieno caos, con cacciatori e cani da caccia presentati in un fitto intreccio con la vegetazione del bosco.

Fig. 3: l'attacco all'unicorno.

Un albero, privo di rami e foglie, spunta al centro dell'arazzo introducendo un senso di prospettiva nella scena. L'albero contrasta con le lance impugnate dai cacciatori contro il corno dell'unicorno.

Insieme a tutti i colori vibranti e alle diverse espressioni raffigurate sui volti dei cacciatori, emerge un senso di serenità creato dal bianco al centro dell'arazzo: l'immagine dell'unicorno.

Il quarto arazzo (fig. 4) ritrae un momento più aggressivo, con l'unicorno intento a combattere nel tentativo di sfuggire ai cacciatori. L'uso della prospettiva è di gran lunga più efficace rispetto alla scena precedente. L'unicorno è raffigurato in un atteggiamento di attacco più aggressivo, nell'attimo in cui il corno colpisce il cane nell'angolo in basso a destra. Una siffatta raffigurazione dell'unicorno in atteggiamento violento era all'epoca inusuale, dal momento che poteva sottrarre bellezza alla sua presenza mistica all'interno di una scena.

Fig. 4: l'unicorno si difende.

In contrasto con la natura dell'animale emersa nel quarto arazzo, il quinto raffigura la sconfitta dell'unicorno e la sfilata sino al castello per essere consegnato ai nobili (fig. 5). Nonostante l'unicorno sia il punto focale della serie, non è il centro di questo arazzo. Sono invece il castello, con i personaggi radunati fuori dal cancello per accogliere l'unicorno, a costituire il centro focale della scena. La sconfitta dell'unicorno è in alto a sinistra e l'occhio dell'unicorno, diversamente da quello delle altre figure presenti nella composizione, punta dritto allo spettatore.

Fig. 5: l'unicorno viene ucciso e portato al castello.

8.7. PANNELLO 7 – GLI ARAZZI DELL'UNICORNO | LINDSAY WOLD (TRAD. E. LANZA)

Il sesto arazzo è l'unico non conservato completamente. I due frammenti superstiti sono intitolati *La cattura mistica dell'unicorno* (fig. 6).

La critica ritiene che oggetto della raffigurazione siano i nobili che ricevono dai cacciatori il corpo dell'unicorno. Fortunatamente su uno dei frammenti si conserva proprio l'unicorno, in una visione ravvicinata dell'attacco di un cane alla schiena dell'unicorno e del corno simbolo distintivo dell'animale. Al di sopra si erge la figura di una nobildonna già presente nel quinto arazzo. Questa solleva la mano sinistra accettando l'offerta dell'animale catturato.

Fig. 6: frammento de *La cattura mistica dell'unicorno*.

Nell'ultimo arazzo della serie intitolata *La caccia all'unicorno*, vediamo l'unicorno nuovamente in vita, rinchiuso in un recinto (fig. 7).

Fig. 7: l'unicorno in cattività.

Questa rappresentazione, l'unica all'interno della serie in cui l'unicorno appare isolato, suggerisce una delle principali interpretazioni dell'iconografia dell'unicorno nell'arte.

Visto da solo, in assenza di altri animali, figure, cacciatori e nobili, l'unicorno può venire considerato un essere risorto, che richiama la rinascita di Cristo. Nonostante l'unicorno sia ritenuto un essere prezioso e di valore, alcuni individui scelgono di inseguirlo e attaccarlo fino ad ucciderlo. Dopo essere stata presentata come annientata al castello dei governanti, la creatura mistica si reincarna e riappare in quello che sembra essere un altro mondo.

8.8. - 8.9. PANNELLI 8 E 9 – GLI ARAZZI DELL'UNICORNO | LINDSAY WOLD (TRAD. F. CATALANO)

La dama e l'unicorno.

L'immagine dell'unicorno è rappresentata in una seconda serie di arazzi realizzati alla fine del XV secolo (figg. 8–13). Anche questa serie, composta da sei arazzi, fu prodotta nei Paesi Bassi ed è riconducibile a disegni della stessa epoca, rinvenuti a Parigi. Tessuti in lana e seta, questi arazzi gareggiano in fascino con quelli della serie *La caccia all'unicorno*, ma non hanno goduto di misure di protezione altrettanto rigorose.

Si ritiene che cinque di questi arazzi raffigurino i cinque sensi, con la rappresentazione finale dell'allegoria del desiderio. Ciascuno di essi presenta l'unicorno affiancato a una nobildonna o a esemplari di altri animali esotici. L'unicorno si trova alla sinistra della dama in tutti i sei arazzi della serie, mentre l'immagine di un leone - sempre sul lato destro - incornicia ed evidenzia la figura della dama e i gesti da lei compiuti, ricollegabili alle allegorie dei cinque sensi.

Nell'arazzo che rappresenta il tatto, la dama interagisce con l'unicorno toccandone, appunto, il corno. Tale oggetto era considerato di gran valore presso i nobili dell'Europa medievale. Si pensava che avrebbe reso magica la vita dei suoi proprietari, se mai fosse stato possibile ottenerne uno.

Il più grande dei sei arazzi e ultimo della serie è intitolato *Desiderio*. Tessuto con l'iscrizione "À Mon Seul Désir" (approssimativamente "secondo il mio unico desiderio"), questo pezzo rappresenta l'amore e le passioni che possono essere create dagli altri cinque sensi. In questa serie, l'unicorno rimane simbolo di nobiltà, ma non è al centro dei sei arazzi. La sua presenza è degna di nota riguardo alla posizione costante e all'importanza che deve avere avuto per il committente, un nobiluomo della corte di re Carlo VII. I gagliardetti mostrati nei sei arazzi recano lo stemma di questo nobile, Jean le Viste.

Fig. 8: Vista.

Fig. 9: Gusto.

Fig. 10: Tatto.

Fig. 11: Olfatto.

Fig. 12: Udito.

Fig. 13: Desiderio.

8.10. PANNELLO 10 – LA VERGINE E L'UNICORNO | KACI FERGUSON (TRAD. F. CATALANO)

La raffigurazione della vergine con l'unicorno si diffuse per la prima volta nel Medio Evo.

Secondo la leggenda, un unicorno poteva essere catturato soltanto con l'aiuto di una vergine. La ragazza avrebbe dovuto essere lasciata sola in una foresta o in un giardino dove fosse stato precedentemente avvistato un unicorno. Questi si sarebbe allora avvicinato alla vergine per rifugiarsi e addormentarsi nel suo grembo. L'animale rimaneva così in una posizione vulnerabile, che permetteva ai cacciatori di catturarlo e ucciderlo facilmente.

Molte delle più antiche raffigurazioni della vergine e dell'unicorno si trovano nei bestiari medievali, raccolte di ciò che allora si credeva fossero animali effettivamente esistenti. I bestiari associavano alle descrizioni degli animali relative storie provviste di una morale.

Più tardi, il racconto della vergine e dell'unicorno divenne un simbolo della Passione di Cristo. Raffigurazioni del genere simboleggiavano inoltre l'Annunciazione. L'unicorno identificava Gesù, la squadra di caccia rappresentava l'arcangelo Gabriele e la fanciulla divenne simbolo della Vergine Maria.

Saltuariamente, alcune donne venivano ritratte insieme ad un unicorno per enfatizzarne la castità.

Fig. 1: *La Castità con l'Unicorno* (1463), Francesco di Giorgio Martini.

Fig. 2: Due frammenti dell'arazzo perduto dagli arazzi dell'Unicorno (particolare) (ca. 1495–1505), anonimo.

Fig. 3: *Annunciazione come caccia all'Unicorno* (1400 ca.), anonimo.

**8.11. PANNELLO 11 – L'UNICORNO NELLA PITTURA DEL XV SECOLO | AMBER
FRAZIER, JOHNNY HILL (TRAD. E. LANZA)**

- 1) **Il trionfo di Battista Sforza (particolare) (1472)**
Piero della Francesca
Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi
Olio su tavola (47 x 33 cm)

- 2) **Allegoria del mese di marzo – Trionfo di Minerva e il segno dell'Ariete (1476-1484)**
Francesco del Cossa
Ferrara, Palazzo Schifanoia
Affresco (216 x 320 cm)

- 3) ***Trionfo di Castità* (1480-1485 circa)**
Jacopo del Sellaio
Fiesole, Museo Bandini
Tempera su tavola (76 x 86,5 cm)

- 4) **Caccia mistica all'unicorno raffigurante l'annunciazione (1489)**
Cerchia di Martin Schongauer
Mosca, Museo Pushkin di Belle Arti
Olio su tavola (51 x 57 cm)

8.12. PANNELLO 12 – L'UNICORNO NELLA PITTURA DEL XVI SECOLO | AMBER FRAZIER, JOHNNY HILL (TRAD. F. CATALANO)

La presente è una raccolta di dipinti del XVI secolo, raffiguranti l'unicorno nei suoi diversi aspetti. Le illustrazioni sono disposte in ordine cronologico, come indicato dalle frecce.

- 1) Il giardino delle delizie (dettaglio) (1480-1505)
Hieronymus Bosch
Madrid, Museo del Prado
Olio su tavola (220 × 390 cm)

- 2) La dama col liocorno (1506)
Raffaello
Roma, Galleria Borghese
Olio su tavola (65 × 51 cm)

- 3) Santa Giustina con l'unicorno (ca. 1530–1534)
Moretto da Brescia
Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum
Olio su tavola (200 × 139 cm)

- 4) Dama con unicorno (1531–1532)
Romanino
Trento, Castello del Buonconsiglio
Affresco (dettaglio)

- 5) Unicorno (Monoceros) (1551)
Conrad Gesner - *Historiæ Animalium*
Stampa

**8.13. PANNELLO 13 – L'UNICORNO SUI FRANCOBOLLI | JOHNNY HILL
(TRAD. E. LANZA)**

Il presente pannello illustra una serie di francobolli raffiguranti l'unicorno provenienti da tutto il mondo. Le illustrazioni sono organizzate in senso cronologico come indicato dalle frecce.

- 1) Ungheria (1970)
- 2) Italia (1963 e 2002)
- 3) Gran Bretagna (2009)
- 4) Australia (2011)
- 5) Belgio (2012)

8.14. PANNELLO 14 – L'UNICORNO NELLA CULTURA AMERICANA | S. DUCHI, C. JEREZ, R. STRONG, E. TAVERNA, S. CROTTA, S. GEMELLO, J. FRIGNOCCA (TRAD. S. DUCHI)

Probabilmente introdotto nel Nuovo Mondo attraverso l'araldica europea, l'unicorno compare spesso nella cultura americana. Nell'arte come nella letteratura e nel cinema, questa creatura immaginaria evoca una dimensione di magia e purezza. Si riscontra tuttavia, in particolare in epoca contemporanea, un utilizzo della sua immagine più legato a certa cultura popolare con connotazioni ironiche, parodiche e talvolta triviali (gadget, satire, parodie, fiction, ecc.).

Narrativa fantasy americana.

Ne "L'ultimo unicorno" (1968) l'autore Peter S. Beagle accompagna il lettore lungo il percorso di una femmina di unicorno che scopre di essere probabilmente l'ultimo esemplare superstite della propria specie. Per cercare gli altri unicorni e scoprire cosa sia loro accaduto, lascerà il bosco (in cui, come tutti gli unicorni, vive protetta) per intraprendere un viaggio che la porterà a incontrare molti personaggi. Alcuni saranno di ostacolo alla sua ricerca, altri la porteranno più vicina alla meta. Scoprirà che gli unicorni sono stati imprigionati da Re Haggard. Determinata a salvare la sua specie, "l'ultimo unicorno" riuscirà nel suo intento. Una storia apprezzata per la narrazione che, attraverso l'interazione di personaggi fiabeschi inseriti in contesti non scontati, offre spunti di riflessione sociale.

Fig. 1: la copertina del romanzo fantasy "L'ultimo unicorno" di P.S. Beagle.

L'unicorno nell'industria cinematografica.

Il film "L'ultimo unicorno" è stato tratto nel 1982 dall'omonimo romanzo. Come nel libro, una femmina di unicorno, Amaltea, apprende da una farfalla che un gigantesco Toro di Fuoco ha imprigionato tutti gli esseri della sua specie. Intraprende quindi un viaggio per cercarli e liberarli. Malgrado il lieto fine, Amaltea dovrà fare i conti con l'avidità, la crudeltà e l'ignoranza degli uomini che hanno voluto la cattura degli unicorni. Il film è un cartone animato con un disegno che attinge sia dal tratto manga che dallo stile occidentale.

Fig. 2: una immagine del film "L'ultimo unicorno".

Blade Runner.

Nel film cult *Blade Runner* (1982) del regista Ridley Scott, l'unicorno appare simbolicamente come elemento che sfuma i confini tra realtà e fantasia. Può inoltre rappresentare la precarietà di un essere puro destinato all'estinzione in una dimensione in cui sia gli umani sia i replicanti (robot con sembianze e ricordi umani) nutrono dubbi sulla propria reale identità ed origine. L'unicorno appare in sogno al protagonista Deckert (Harrison Ford) che poi, nella realtà, lo riceve in dono come origami: due sequenze che creano un collegamento ricco di implicazioni tra immaginazione e vita reale.

Fig. 3: origami a forma di unicorno nel film di Ridley Scott "Blade Runner".

Edgar Tolson e il suo unicorno.

Edgar Tolson (1904–1984), artista del Kentucky, è considerato uno dei più significativi esponenti della Folk Art. La sua visione e produzione sono state fortemente influenzate da un rapporto intenso sia con la natura sia con le narrazioni bibliche. Le opere maggiormente conosciute sono quelle relative ad una serie di sculture ispirate al libro della *Genesi* raffiguranti il peccato originale. Tolson amava anche creare oggetti che regalava agli amici. In particolare realizzava mucche, tori, cavalli, ma anche unicorni che divennero i suoi soggetti più amati. Disse infatti: " Mi piacerebbe vederne uno un giorno, ma credo che li tengano tutti là in Europa". Secondo la critica, per Tolson "intagliare unicorni significava continuare a far vivere la magia e la meraviglia".

Fig. 4: l'artista Edgar Tolson con il suo unicorno in legno.

8.15. PANNELLO 15 – L'UNICORNO NEL CINEMA | AMBER FRAZIER, JOHNNY HILL, CLAUDETTE JEREZ, VALERIE RAMAGE
(TRAD. S. DUCHI)

Harry Potter e la pietra filosofale (2001).

Gli unicorni in questo film si nascondono nella Foresta Proibita vicino ad Hogwarts e sono gli esseri più puri di tutto il pianeta. Il loro sangue può offrire una seconda possibilità di vita a chi sta per morire. Il costo da pagare tuttavia è altissimo, perché chi beve il sangue dell'unicorno è dannato per sempre, avendo ucciso un essere tanto innocente e indifeso. Il "cattivo" Voldemort, nel film, uccide molti unicorni e beve il loro sangue, ma questo lo porterà solo a sopravvivere come un parassita in un altro uomo.

Fig. 1: l'unicorno in *Harry Potter e la pietra filosofale*.

Legend (1985).

E' lo stesso regista Ridley Scott che, utilizzando la medesima scena dell'unicorno, crea un curioso collegamento tra *Legend* e il suo più famoso film cult *Blade Runner* del 1982, in cui questo animale fantastico aveva una valenza simbolica di purezza e fragilità. In *Legend* gli unicorni conoscono solo il linguaggio dell'amore e del sorriso, e solo i più puri tra gli esseri umani possono entrare in contatto con loro. Simboleggiano quindi la purezza e non "conoscono il male" come dice Jack (Tom Cruise), il protagonista. L'oscurità tuttavia vuole distruggere gli ultimi unicorni sulla Terra lasciando che il Male si impossessi del mondo.

Fig. 2: l'unicorno e due personaggi di *Legend*.

Bitter Business (2013).

E' un cortometraggio realizzato alla St John International University dagli studenti che hanno voluto interpretare in chiave ironica la leggenda della vergine e dell'unicorno, scegliendo di invertirne i ruoli. Nelle leggende più antiche si narra che l'unicorno potesse essere catturato e ucciso solo dopo essere stato adescato da una vergine. Nel cortometraggio *Bitter Business* l'unicorno viene invece attratto prendendo in ostaggio il protagonista, impersonato da uno studente. Sarà la sorella del ragazzo rapito a consegnare l'unicorno al rapitore, restituendo sì la libertà all'ostaggio, ma rinunciando all'unicorno (che si scopre poi essere niente altro che un pupazzo di *peluche*...).

Fig. 3: l'unicorno in *Bitter Business*.

8.16. PANNELLO 16 – GLI ANIMALI SACRI NELL'ANTICO EGITTO | KORBY BOSWELL, ALESSIA FASSONE (TRAD. S. DA ROS)

Nell'antico Egitto molti animali venivano considerati sacri, in quanto si pensava che costituissero una personificazione delle divinità.

Secondo il mito, gli animali avrebbero preso parte attiva alla creazione. Si narra ad esempio che Geb, raffigurato come un'oca, avesse deponso un "uovo cosmico" dal quale presero poi vita il sole e la terra.

Fig. 1: dipinto raffigurante oche dalla Tomba di Nefermaat a Maydum.

Significativamente diverso dal mito della creazione è quello legato al dio Anubis, raffigurato con la testa di sciacallo. Considerato il dio della mummificazione, guidava gli individui nell'aldilà. In molti credevano che Anubis vegliasse sul morto, aiutandolo nel processo di mummificazione, durante il quale i sacerdoti indossavano talvolta una maschera raffigurante il dio.

Fig. 3: Anubis come guardiano della Tomba di Tutankhamun.

Nell'antico Egitto l'ariete era il simbolo del dio Khnum. L'ariete veniva considerato un animale molto fertile e, secondo il mito della creazione, era Khnum a creare i corpi dei bambini e a metterli nel grembo delle madri.

Fig. 2: il viale delle Sfingi a testa di ariete a Karnak.

Come dio della creazione, della rinascita e del movimento del sole, Khepri veniva rappresentato sotto forma di scarabeo. Gli scarabei depongono le uova in una palla formata da escrementi e la fanno rotolare sul terreno fino a che le uova con i piccoli scarabei non si schiudono. Si riteneva che il dio della creazione Khepri fosse stato generato da un'aura sottile.

Fig. 4: lo scarabeo solare naviga sulla barca del dio Sole Ra.

8.17. PANNELLO 17 – GLI ANIMALI SACRI NELL'ANTICO EGITTO | STEFANO CROTTA, KACI FERGUSON (TRAD. S. DA ROS)

Nell'antico Egitto, uno dei più importanti animali sacri era il toro Api, collegato alla fertilità e alla ricchezza, due aspetti essenziali per l'agricoltura.

Per essere identificato come toro Api, l'animale doveva avere precise caratteristiche: corpo nero con un triangolo bianco sulla fronte; un segno bianco a forma di ala di avvoltoio sulla schiena; l'impronta di uno scarabeo sotto la lingua; una mezzaluna bianca sul fianco destro; doppi peli sulla coda. Quando veniva trovato un toro con queste caratteristiche, esso veniva portato al tempio e usato come oracolo. Quando un toro Api moriva, veniva mummificato e sepolto in un sarcofago di pietra. Solo dopo la sua morte poteva cominciare la ricerca di un nuovo toro Api.

Fig. 1: il Toro Api dal Serapeion di Alessandria.

Hathor era la dea della fertilità, la cui manifestazione più comune sulla terra era la mucca. Veniva comunemente raffigurata come una dea mucca, con in testa le corna entro le quali c'era un disco solare con l'ureo. Hathor era considerata la "Madre delle madri" in quanto era la dea delle donne, della fertilità, dei bambini e del parto. Veniva anche venerata come dea della bellezza, della gioia, dell'amore, degli idilli amorosi, del profumo, della danza e della musica.

Fig. 2: Hathor, signora dell'Occidente.

Fig. 3: capitello di colonna in forma di Hathor, Louvre, Parigi.

Bastet veniva raffigurata con sembianze muliebri e testa di gatta. Il nome Bastet probabilmente significa "colei dal vaso di unguenti", perché veniva associata al profumo. Bastet veniva associata inoltre alla maternità, dal momento che i gatti generano molti cuccioli e tendono ad essere particolarmente protettivi nei loro confronti.

Bastet era la divinità protettrice della città di Bubastis, dove ogni anno venivano organizzate grandi feste in suo onore nelle quali le donne ballavano e cantavano.

Nell'antico Egitto i gatti erano adorati perché erano in grado di combattere il problema dei parassiti. A Bubastis le famiglie spesso imbalsamavano i gatti deceduti e li seppellivano nel tempio della città.

Fig. 4: statua bronzea di Bastet, Louvre, Parigi.

Fig. 5: mamma gatta con gattini, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.

8.18. PANNELLO 18 – GLI ANIMALI SACRI NELL'ANTICO EGITTO | MAJDA BENFAIDA, KORBY BOSWELL, VALERIE RAMAGE, RACHEL STRONG (TRAD. S. DA ROS)

Sobek era l'antico dio dei cocodrilli e si pensava che fosse il creatore del mondo, nato dalle acque per creare l'ordine nell'universo. Sobek portava anche fertilità lungo il Nilo. Si credeva che fosse il protettore del faraone, di cui simboleggiava potenza e velocità. Per via della ferocia, Sobek veniva anche considerato protettore dell'esercito.

Sobek veniva raffigurato come un cocodrillo, un cocodrillo mummificato oppure come un uomo con la testa di cocodrillo. Quando raffigurato come uomo, di solito indossava un copricapo con un disco solare circondato da corna.

Sobek aveva diverse mogli e figli a seconda dei miti delle diverse regioni. Nel periodo tolemaico e in quello romano venne costruito un tempio a Kom Ombo in onore di Sobek, nel quale si venerava però anche il dio Horus.

Fig. 1: il dio Sobek a testa di cocodrillo dal tempio di Kom Ombo.

Nella mitologia egizia, ai babbuini era attribuito un ruolo interessante e insieme misterioso, dal momento che erano associati a Thoth, il dio della saggezza, della scienza e della misura.

I babbuini venivano raffigurati su una bilancia mentre pesavano e giudicavano i cuori dei morti. Thoth era inoltre il patrono degli scribi.

I babbuini non erano solo il simbolo della buona luna, ma erano anche il simbolo del dio sole Ra.

I babbuini hanno l'abitudine di emettere suoni acuti all'alba e di scaldarsi al sole. Proprio per questo venivano anche dipinti con le braccia alzate rivolte verso il sole.

Fig. 2: Thot, patrono degli scribi, Walters Art Gallery, Baltimora.

Nella mitologia egizia, Sekmet era la dea guerriera e, nell'Alto Egitto, era anche considerata dea della guarigione. Veniva raffigurata come una donna dalla testa di leone. Secondo il mito era figlia del Dio sole Ra. Il suo nome deriva dalla parola "sekhem" che significa "la potente".

Fig. 3: statue di Sekmet, Museo Egizio, Torino.

La famosa sfinge di Giza, tutta costruita in pietra calcarea, è caratterizzata da corpo di leone e testa umana. In molte culture antiche il leone era considerato simbolo del sole.

La testa di faraone e il corpo di leone simboleggiano la forza e il potere, in quanto il faraone era il regolatore dell'ordine cosmico.

Fig. 4: viale delle sfingi leonine a Luxor.

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