

The University of Toledo



Unicorns: Past, Present and in the Imagination (A Folkloric Overview)



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Acknowledgments

It is nearly time to discuss the different interpretations, myths, evolution, traditions and origins of the unicorn. Though before the discussion on any of the mentioned above items can take place, acknowledgements must be made to the primary factors that allowed for the creation of this project. Because, without the factors listed below, this project would have never of been.

The most vital information that was used to create this project came from books, the Internet and pen and paper surveys. The first form of research that was conducted was the section that required books. Without, the books on unicorns and animal folklore that were found in the University of Toledo's library and the local Monroe County Library System, there would be no project. Because it is through books such as Chris Laver's *The Natural History of Unicorns*, that a firm understanding about the truth of unicorn lore and evolution was uncovered. Furthermore, the set up of the books provided the grounds for the organization of this project. Lastly, books that were used that were not scholarly in nature also played a pivotal role in the project. Because it was through novels and other entertainment literary works that provided a firm view into how unicorns have changed and evolved over the centuries.

As for the Internet, it was used to enhance the reader's ability to enjoy this project by providing visuals of exotic or imaginary animals that might be hard to imagine. Furthermore, the pictures in this project also showcase the evolution that unicorns have taken. Then, in addition to showing the different variations of unicorns, examples of material lore of the unicorn, (such as unicorn horn knives) were found on the Internet as well. Then lastly, the Internet was used to find the website of the Unicorn Lady, of which provided some much needed information on unicorns.

As for the most vital part of the research gathering process, that would be the surveys that accompanied this project. Without the surveys, this project would be nearly meaningless. Because although the Internet can give pictures of what a modern day person might imagine a unicorn to look like, one cannot know what inspired the person to draw or paint such a piece of art without directly asking them. Hence it is the surveys of this project that have allowed for a modern interpretation of unicorns to emerge.

Thanks also must be given to thank the University of Toledo English Department for approving this endeavor, and granting me this independent study. If it were not for this class, *Unicorns: Past, Present and in the Imagination* would probably have never been revised since its initial début in the University of Toledo's 2012 Folklore class. Finally, I would like to thank Dr. Compora for mentoring me, and sacrificing his time to help me with this project.

Now that all the contributing factors that have led to the creation of this endeavor have been cited, it is time to jump into the worlds of fact and imagination that have created the unicorn. Though, like many objects of study in folklore, unicorns have met with certain stereotypes that can make a person uneasy. Therefore, before the history of the unicorn is explored, a look at the stereotypes that have been attributed to the animal must first be examined.

Introduction: Unicorn Stereotypes

In recent history, unicorns have been stereotyped as feminine creatures that belong in the imaginations of small children. Now, despite how prominent the mentioned above stereotype is, it is important not to be beguiled by it. Because in actuality, the image of the cute and cuddly unicorn is only a preconceived notion that has been created by the children's entertainment business. Also, it should be noted that the unicorn's origin does not begin with children. Instead, the foundation of the unicorn lies with farmers, warlords, religious leaders and scholars (Laver 5), who focused on the animal's mystic, and biblical importance. It should also be noted that as humans evolved, so too did the unicorn, which is one of the reasons why they have changed so much over the centuries. As for how unicorn lore evolved, that had to do with changing political, religious values, and cultural diffusion.

At this point, it should be noted that for cultural diffusion to take place, unicorns had to exist simultaneously in the oral, material and customary lore in a vast number of cultures. By the fact that unicorns existed in so many cultures all at once, it indicates that, despite their unrealistic features, and powers, there must be something about unicorns that has transfixed people around the globe and through the ages. Though, as to what it is about the unicorn that has transfixed people of the past, and enamored modern people, that continues to be something of a mystery.

Hopefully though, the rest of this work will illuminate some of the mysteries of why humans have been charmed by the unicorn. Therefore, with no further ado, it is time to look at unicorns in modern society, and what better way to start an analyst of modern unicorns than with a quote from the acclaimed fiction/fantasy writer, and unicorn enthusiast, Bruce Coville:

But beware! That wonder and that healing and that grace do not come without a price, as many of these stories will tell you. For this is not a book about sappy unicorns. The writers of the stories that follow know magic is tough, love hard and demanding, and unicorns not as easy as some of us might like to think; neither safe,

nor sweet nor simple. Following the unicorn path requires all the strength, patience, and courage you can muster. Unicorns expect sacrifice from those who love them—and from those they love in return.

But if your heart is bold and your spirit true, the rewards can be great indeed.

Downright glorious, in fact.

So take a deep breath and turn the page.

You'll find a glory of unicorns, waiting to sweep you away.

With Coville's masterfully written statement on his personal views of what unicorns are, it is time to examine the interpretations that humanity has attributes to the unicorn.



*Modern
Interpretations
of Unicorns*

Unicorns come to modern day people in any number of ways. Just to name a few, people can find unicorns in the form of gift shop statues, mugs, Internet memes, the YouTube series *Charlie the Unicorn*, and grotesque test tube unicorn fetuses can even be purchased online. Though, according to the survey's that accompanied this endeavor; most modern Americans do not receive their first encounter with unicorns from mugs or jarred unicorn fetuses. Instead, most individuals are first introduced to unicorns via popular culture, such as books, movies or toys, and while it may not seem like it, introducing young children to unicorns in this way has greatly altered the creature's appearance in the last few decades.

Because of the desire to create safe environments for children, it is not surprising unicorns have been stripped of their original shape and have become Americanized. As Dr. Gregory puts it, "it is customary for modern authors of children's literature to humanize animals and make them seem tame, thus taking their animalistic beauty and wildness away". Therefore, it should come as no surprise that when a person of the 21st century is asked to describe the shape of a unicorn, the typical answer is that of a cute, white horse with big watery eyes and a pretty horn growing out of its head. Indeed, interpretations of fluffy cute unicorns that fart out rainbows, such as the one in Meg Cabot's *Princess Pretty Pants* in the anthology *Zombies Vs. Unicorns* are among the most popular. Also, another interpretation of the unicorn that was created by pop culture is the crossbreed of the unicorn and Pegasus.

An example a unicorn that was given wings by popular culture is the white and pink unicorn with a golden mane and tail known as Sunstar from *Princess Gwenevere and the Jewel Riders*. To those who are unaware of its existence, *Princess Gwenevere and the Jewel Riders* was a cartoon show that aired in the 1990s that was aimed, young girls. The show was

loosely based off of Arthurian legend with science fiction elements added in, and chronicles a group of young women who ride talking unicorns and collected gems to save the galaxy.

Anyway, despite what the show's producers may have thought when they and the animators brought Sunstar to the small screen; mixing the wings of the Pegasus and the horn of the unicorn was not a benign act in terms of keeping the purity of the animals. Because by combing the two mythical creatures, the creators of the show are not celebrating, but instead bastardizing both creatures. Turning the unicorn and Pegasus into one creature takes away the symbolism that each individual being claims, thus solidifying the insignificance and meaninglessness of each animal. As for why the hybrid of the two creatures subtracts from the importance of each being, it is because symbolism is all that fictional creatures have, and without it, they are nothing more than superfluous and pointless.

Moreover, it should also be noted that while both creatures share some similarities, such as their elusiveness, elegance and the fact that they are both equines, there are far more differences between the animals than similarities. One of the largest differences between the unicorn and Pegasus lies in what they symbolize and their origin story. While the unicorn's creation is nothing but a mystery, Pegasus can claim Poseidon as a father and Medusa for a mother. Also, it should be mentioned that Pegasus has no healing powers and cannot purify water. Instead, Pegasus was revered for his strength, speed and his and Bellerophon's (his rider) achievement of slaying the chimera—a fire-breathing monster with a lion's head, a goat's body, and a serpent's tail. Also, it should be noted that Pegasus also symbolizes freedom as he does not willingly become or stay a tame steed. Instead, Bellerophon has to use a golden bridle to tame Pegasus. Then, as the story continues, Bellerophon becomes filled full of pride and tries to ride Pegasus to Mount Olympus. In return for his arrogance, Bellerophon falls to

his death from Pegasus' back, (Leeming 108) and without a second look at his master, Pegasus takes to the sky and returns to his freedom.

As should be clear by now, Pegasus individuality, power, freedom, flight, miracle birth; not purity, healing or virginity, like the unicorn does. It should also be noted that despite the fact that combining the two mythic equines destroys everything that each of the individual animals symbolize, the trend has continued since the cancelation of *Princess Gwenevere and the Jewel Riders*. In more recent history, unicorns and Pegasus have been combined into one being by the creative minds behind the *My Little Pony* series.

According to the website *TvTropes*, in the *My Little Pony* series, the pony royalty consists of unicorn/Pegasus hybrids, which are referred to as, pegacorns, uniPEGs, alicorns. Now, while at first glance it appears that *My Little Pony* use of the word 'alicorn' seems greatly misplaced, as an alicorn is actually the proper name of a unicorn's horn, there is actually some rationale behind the title. According to *TvTropes*, *My Little Pony* came up with the title by using the French language and combining words, "French words for wing (aile) and horn (corne). Note that in French, the word for unicorn is also licorne" (*TvTropes*). Therefore, as one can see, it appears the creative minds behind *My Little Pony* have done their research when it comes to the title of their hybrids. Yet it should be noted, that referring to their hybrids as alicorns, is rather confusing, as alicorns have been previously known as known as the proper name for the horn of a unicorn. Therefore, it can be said, that no matter how unintentional, it seems that *My Little Pony* has done a fair job of tainting the purity of unicorn lore via the confusing terminology they have created.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that there are interpretations of unicorns in modern society that do not partake in continuing the existence of hybrids and sickeningly sweet ponies

with horns on their head. Such examples can be found in Diana Peterfreund's novel *Rampant*. The novel *Rampant* contains unconventional unicorns that resemble Persian unicorns with their fierce attitudes, the desires to eat human flesh, and their poisonous fangs and horns. Also, it should be noted that a few of the stories in *Zombies Vs. Unicorn* are not about childish unicorns. A couple of examples would be the last unicorn story in the collection, which is about a homicidal unicorn with suicidal thoughts that has become addicted to healing people. While Margo Lanagan story in the collection, *A Thousand Flowers*, consist of a unicorn that rapes a princess who kills herself after her unicorn hybrid offspring dies.

Lastly, it should be noted that, there are some modern stories that feature more traditional and iconic unicorns. A few examples would be *Stardust* by Neil Gaiman, and the works of Bruce Coville (the man who coined the term 'a glory' to refer to a band of unicorns) and Tanith Lee's. The unicorn in Gaiman's *Stardust* is described as a quick healing, ivory horned white horse that "glowed gently in the darkness, like a moon seen through clouds" (154) who engaged in traditional unicorn vs. lion battle for the crown. While unicorns that appear in Coville's *The Unicorn Chronicles*, are intelligent white haired, cloven-hoofed creatures that have their own monarch, and have fled earth due to being hunted to the verge of extinction. Also, it should be noted that Coville's uses the unicorn and the hunter tradition as well, as his unicorn are the eternal enemies of the Hunters, who are the decadence from Beloved, a woman who received immortality when the tip of a unicorn's horn was lodged in her heart. While Lee's *Black Unicorn*, is a book that features a black unicorn with a horn made out of bone. The unicorn in Lee's story is brought back from the dead via magic and proceeds to stalk the maiden who resurrected it, until the girl finally uses magic to send the creature back to its home universe.

With all the different kinds of unicorns in modern society, many questions arise, though most promote of these arisen questions are, where did the tale of the original unicorns start? How did it start? What did the unicorn first appear to look like? And, how did the unicorn evolve in so many directions? With all these origin questions, it is time to follow the evolution of the unicorn, and what better place to start than the first written accounts of the creature. With no further delay, it is time to discuss the first interpretation of the unicorn as written by the great Greek scholar and animal expert, Ctesias.



Tale of Origin

Ctesias (pronounced Kuh-TEE -see-us) was an animal expert that lived roughly 2,500 years ago (Laver 4). Who traveled to India and published the book *Indica* (Laver 5). Which gives detailed accounts of the strange animals Ctesias found. Though, saying that Ctesias was a scholar of animals does not mean that his accounts are perfect, or even accurate. A good example of how Ctesias's description of animals fails would be his description of a tiger. According to Ctesias, the tiger is an animal that "is as big as a lion, has the face of a man's and has a tale like a scorpion's from which it fires stings" (Laver 15). With his weak interpretation of a tiger, it is no surprise that Ctesias's account of unicorns (or Wild Asses as he called them) could be a misinterpretation of another animal. Also, that fact that Ctesias never saw one of his Wild Asses in person, and received his accounts of the animal by farmers who claimed to have seen the beast, or heard legends of the animal, only adds to the invalidity of Ctesias's accounts.

Now, knowing that Ctesias's interpretation of the unicorn was most likely just a misinterpretation, it is now time to ask the question: what animal did Ctesias mistakenly create the unicorn from? Well, the most likely candidate is the Indian rhinoceros. Though the rhinoceros seems like a far cry from the graceful, white horses that people have come to know unicorns by, the rhinoceros actually fits remarkably well with Ctesias description of his Wild Ass. Odell Shepherd recounts the description of one of Ctesias's Wild Asses as interpreted by the Greek scholar himself:

There are in India certain wild asses that which are as large as a horse, and larger. Their bodies are white, their heads dark red, and their eyes dark blue. They have a horn on their forehead which is about a foot and a half in length. The dust filed from this horn is administered into a potion as a protection to deadly drugs. . . . the animal is exceedingly swift and powerful, so that no creature, neither horse nor any other can overtake it. (27-28)

If one looks closely, many elements of the rhinoceros appear in Ctesias's description, most notably the horn and strength. In ancient India, it was a popular belief that rhinoceros horns could be used as medicine, and as a cure for poisons. The use of rhinoceros horns as medicine is likely where the lore that unicorns have healing powers originally stemmed from. Furthermore, the ancient people of India had a cultural tradition of fashioning rhinoceros horns into cups with the belief that the material of the cup would ward off poisons. As one can see, not only do both the rhinoceros and Wild Ass have a horn, but also, both the Wild Ass's horn and the rhinoceros's were said to contain healing properties. As for the appearance of the Wild Ass, the rhinoceros immense strength, size and impressive speed when galloping, is likely where the notion of the unicorn being swift and powerful comes from. Now that the origin of the unicorn has been discussed, it is time to discuss the evolution that the unicorn experienced, and to travel back to the unicorn's first stops on its road to its' iconic, and eventual modern venison of itself.



*Evolution of
the Unicorn*

Ctesias's *Indica* was published, and though scholars seemed to be infatuated with the stories and accounts that Ctesias's took. Though, much like how people doubted the first stories of the animals of Australia, as they just sounded too unbelievable, many of Ctesias's contemporaries doubted his accuracy. Indeed, Ctesias's fellow Greeks thought many of the creatures that he documented just sounded too far-fetched. Though, it should be noted that even the ancient scholars who doubted the validity of Ctesias's *Indica*, did not dispute the idea that the unicorn was a real animal. Nor is there evidence that anyone claimed that a large animal with healing powers and a horn growing out of its forehead sounded unrealistic. In fact, it seems that many scholars just assumed that Ctesias must have not correctly recorded what the unicorn looked or behaved like. A notable person that disputed Ctesias's interpretation of the unicorn was Julius Caesar.

Julius Caesar believed that unicorns existed, but that they were not the size nor shape that Ctesias's described (Giblin 16). Instead, Julius Caesar thought that unicorns lived not in India, but in the Black Forest (Known then as the Hercynian Forest) of Germany. As for the appearance of this German unicorn, Julius Caesar is reported to have said that the creature resembled an ox that resembled a stag, and had one antler growing out of the center of its head. (Giblin16). As for what inspired Julius Caesar's vision of the unicorn, that remains a mystery.

Another wise man that had his own interpretation of the unicorn was Pliny the Elder (A.D. 23-79). Pliny the Elder was a Roman naturalist who seemed to combine Ctesias's and Julius Caesar's accounts of the unicorn into one creature and added a few details of his own. According to Pliny, the unicorn lived in India, had the body of a graceful horse, the head of a stag, feet like an elephant and the tail of a boar, a three foot long black horn coming from the

center of its head, and could not be taken alive. (Giblin 19). As one can imagine, Pliny's unicorn is an almost monstrous abomination, of these two accounts and is thus a creation of another animal altogether. Though despite its monstrous appearances, Pliny's unicorn was still accepted as a real creature because an authoritative figure claimed that it existed.

With so many accounts of unicorn by authoritative figures, it is no surprise that the unicorn found its way into legends that contain historical figures; a few examples are the tales of Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Confucius. According to the old legends, Alexander the Great's mighty steed Bucephalus was really a unicorn with a single horn growing out of its head and a peacock like tail that fought mightily at his master's side in battle (Niggs 77).

As for the tale of Genghis Khan, it is said that a unicorn appeared before Genghis Khan and told him not to attack India. Taking the words of the unicorn at great value, Genghis Khan did not invade India. (Niggs 77). There is also an old tale that states that when Confucius's mother was pregnant with him, a unicorn blessed Confucius through his mother, and his mother tied a ribbon around the unicorn's horn. As the story continues, Confucius grows up, with the blessing of the unicorn running through his veins, but one-day, Confucius comes upon a hunter who has killed a unicorn. Upon inspection of the creature, Confucius sees the ribbon that his mother tied around the animal's horn, and he weeps for the beast (Laver 30).

As one can see the centuries that followed after the publication of Ctesias's *Indica*, and before the death of Jesus Christ, were quite important for the evolution of the unicorn. Yet, despite all of the features that were discussed and traits that were attributed to the unicorn in the time before Christ, one important question remains. How much did these Greek and

Roman scholars actually contribute to the modern construct of the unicorn? Surely when one thinks of a unicorn, one's thoughts do not bring a description of Ctesias's to mind; nor those of Pliny or Julius Caesar's. Yet one cannot ignore the fact that both the iconic unicorn and the ancient unicorn have many of the same traits and powers, such as healing, strength, and swiftness of foot. Therefore, it is best to treat both iconic and ancient unicorns as an animal that has evolved into a separate species, but like a butterfly and a caterpillar; it is easy to see the influence that one animal has over the other, yet they are two different creatures. With the mentioned above thoughts in mind, it is time to delve into the iconic unicorn and see what twist of fate made it sever from the original idea of the unicorn.



Iconic Unicorns

With all the different accounts of the unicorn, from the fierce ones like Bucephalus, to the peaceful Asian ones that Confucius and Genghis Khan are said to have encountered, one has to wonder, how did the iconic imagery of the noble white unicorn come to be? Well, the answer to that question may be quite simple; in fact, the event that led to the modern ideal of the unicorn may hardly have anything to do with the old legends or accounts of unicorns. According to Laver, the iconic unicorn evolved from the Christian unicorn, not the ancient unicorns of Alexander the Great or Genghis Khan (49). What is more, is that Laver also claims the first account of the traditional Christian unicorn that is documented in the Bible, is merely a typo. (49).

According to Laver, there is an old legend that Ptolemy II (285-247 BC) commissioned a Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible for the Library of Alexandria. (50). While translating the Bible, the translators came across a word they did not have an equivalent to, and from this word the Judo-Christian unicorn arises. The word that the translators did not have an equivalent to, was reem (or in some translations re'em) which, according to the text, "the reem had to be a large, horned, domestically useless . . . it also had to be a real creature, like the bulls and other beast that accompanied it in the text. But since the reem and the bull shared the same sentence on occasion, the reem could not be a bull" (Laver 50). Since the reem was not a bull, and it was domestically useless, the reem was translated into monoceros, which literally means one-horn.

As the years passed, monoceros was translated to unicornus in Latin, and then became unicorn in English, and was then translated to 'wild ox' in modern times when belief in the unicorn faded (South 13). Now, it is not clear if the translators intended people to interpret the monoceros as a rhinoceros or as one of Ctesias's one horned Wild Asses; however, it is

known that there was a rejection of the idea that the monoceros was a rhinoceros. As for why the rhinoceros was rejected as the reem, it was because the common person believed that the rhinoceros were too brutish and ugly to be in the Bible (Laver 51).

Because of the reem's unknown origin and features, the Judo-Christen unicorn did not receive any great amount of detail in the Bible. In fact, according to Malcolm South, despite the fact that the unicorn appears eight times in the Bible, the descriptions of the creature were quite vague (13). In fact, one of the most detailed passages on unicorns in the Bible occurs in Isaiah 34.7 "And the unicorns shall come down with them, [the powers of God] and the bullocks with their bulls; and their land shall be soaked with blood, and their dust made fat with fatness." As one can see, nothing of the character of the unicorn is revealed in this passage or for that matter, in any passage in the Bible. Due to the lack of information on the unicorn that the Bible provided, the priest, and common people of the time were the ones that took the task of molding the character of the unicorns (Laver 60).

One of the first figures to shape the character of the biblical unicorn was Tertullian of Carthage (AD160-220). Tertullian was a lawyer, who despised, jewelry, marriage, women fancy clothes, and luxurious baths (Stroud). In fact, Tertullian even hated construction, (he thought that it was a sin to pervert the land that God gave his people.), along with theater. Tertullian even stated that, "Christian discipline, which forbids, among other sins in the world, the pleasures of the public shows" (1). Though, despite his radical beliefs, Tertullian is credited with the first interpretation of the unicorn's horn as the vertical beam of Christ's cross, thus fusing the most iconic symbol of the Christian religion and the unicorn together, (Laver 59). Later on, religious figures decided that if the unicorn was to be so closely linked with Jesus, then the animal must be noble, pure, and strong. Furthermore, since Jesus Christ is

tightly connected to virgins and healing, it was officially decided that the unicorn would be too, and thus the iconic unicorn was born (Laver 60).

Aside from unicorns being tied to Christ, they also show up in the Bible as symbols of arrogance, and strength. A good example of arrogant unicorns in the Bible can be found with Noah. Now, while there is a general consensus that the unicorns did not survive the great flood, there are a few different interpretations of how the animals died. *The Unicorn*, a song by the band Irish Rovers, states that the unicorns did not make it onto Noah's Ark because they were too busy playing to remember to board the ark. Because of their failure to flee the flood, Irish Rovers state that this caused the whole species to become extinct.

Now while the Irish Rovers have taken some liberties, their song is actually based on biblical lore that does indeed state that the unicorns did not manage to survive the great flood. However, the more traditional answers as to why the unicorn was not on Noah's Ark has nothing to do with unicorns being silly creatures that just 'missed the boat'. According to *The Mystic Unicorn Lady*, Noah tried to take the unicorns with him, but they were so big that Noah had to tie them onto the side of the Ark. Yet, even though Noah was able to tie the unicorns onto the side of the Ark, they were too heavy, and were sinking the ship, so Noah had to cut the ropes in order to save all the other animals, himself and the Ark.

Another story of why the unicorn was not on the Ark is because the unicorn was arrogant and selfless, choosing to swim instead of take space up on the Ark for other creatures. According to the stories, the unicorn was fine swimming through the flood, but the unicorn met with its demise when Noah let the birds out of the Ark for the first time in forty days. The birds were weak from their confinement and when they were flying towards land, they were not able to make it all the way without rest. With nothing to rest on but the

unicorn's horn, all the birds of the Ark used it as a perch, and the unicorn, not being able to manage the extra weight of all the birds, drowned.

Another tale of why unicorns did not make it into the Ark is because Noah ordered them off the Ark as they tried oppressing and domination the other animals that Noah was trying to save. Then finally, the last historical theory of why the unicorn did not make it on to the Ark was because if both unicorns and lions were put on the Ark together, they would kill each other, so Noah had to make a choice. Either save the unicorns or save the lions, and Noah chose the lions over the unicorns.

Hopefully, by now it is clear that the early Christians believed in unicorns as much as they believed in lions or bulls. Yet, it cannot be ignored that most seemed to be aware that these creatures were not around. However, because the Christians were so enamored by the idea of the unicorn, what it represented, and because it was written in the Bible as a factual animal, they could not disregard the creature. Therefore, it would seem that the early Christians had to come up with a reason why the unicorn was not around, and they chose to do that with Noah's tale of the great flood.



Killing Unicorns

One of the consequences of being so closely tied to virgins was the flood of all the lore that surrounds unicorns and maidens, especially the lore that states that maidens are a unicorn's biggest weakness. Even in the modern day world, it is widely known that unicorns can be tamed by or, at least approached by pure young maidens. An example of maidens and unicorns that can be found in modern media can be found in Bruce Coville's *Unicorn Chronicles* and in Diana Peterfreund's novel *Rampant*.

In the fourth book of Coville's *Unicorn Chronicles*, *The Last Hunt*, unicorn hunters invade the world of the unicorns and use maidens to lure the unicorns to them. Then once the unicorns are near enough, the hunters kill the unicorns with swords and daggers. As one can see, Coville used the classic method of killing unicorns for his novel, though the same cannot be said for Peterfreund. In her novel *Rampant*, Peterfreund takes some liberties with the old unicorn and maiden myths. Instead of the unicorns allowing the maidens to bridle them, and sleep upon their laps, in Peterfreund's novel, it is only a maiden who can stand up to the toxic fumes and poisons that are spouted from the unicorns breath, blood and horn and are able to kill the unicorns. Moreover, Peterfreund also makes the characters in *Rampant* meet another requirement, for they must all have the blood of Alexander the Great, flowing through their veins.

As one can see, Peterfreund highly changed the relationship of unicorns and maidens, yet throughout all of the perversions she made, it is clear where she got her inspiration of using maidens to kill unicorns from. Much like Coville's novel, historically, it was said that if a king wanted a unicorn horn for himself, a hunting party must be led into the woods with a maiden in the lead:

To actually catch the beast, more subtlety was required. It was said that the Unicorn would only suffer the presence of those pure of heart – in other words a creature as innocent as the Unicorn itself. It long ago became widely believed that men quickly lost their innocence, but that women preserved the quality for far longer, and so it soon became established lore that to bait a Unicorn, a young woman –even a child-was needed. (Mathews)

Then, once the unicorn senses the maiden, it would rest its head upon her lap and sleep. After the unicorn was asleep, the hunting party would come forth, release the hounds and then gore the unicorn to death. Though it may seem strange to a modern day person that the way to kill a unicorn was to use a maiden, it is actually not a strange concept at all once one thinks of the place of women in society at the time that this method was devised.

It is a common known fact that, back when the majority of people still believed in unicorns, women were considered to be temptress and in some extreme cases, witches. Then, with the added popularity of the Old Testament, women were further looked down upon by society for the sins of Eve from the Garden of Eden and considered the lesser gender. With all the biased against woman, it is not surprising that religious leaders would use maidens as the means of killing a unicorn to show that when one is tempted by a woman, he will be killed or captured. In other words, “So, from this tradition, the hunt of the unicorn is a story of the deceit of women. Fall for a woman the legend warns, and you will end up like the unicorn, dead.” (Segers).

However, according to Seagers, despite the negative view that the Old Testament had for women the New Testament’s respect for the Virgin Mary helped beautify the idea of virginity and woman. To prove that the idea of killing a unicorn is a pro feminist idea when taken from the New Testament perspective, one merely has to let the image and symbolism speak for itself. In Christianity, the unicorn is almost a proxy Christ as the unicorn has the same healing powers as Christ. Meanwhile, the virgin used as the bait for the unicorn can be

seen as a proxy for the Virgin Mary. Therefore, when the unicorn rests his head on the lap of the maiden, it is symbolizing the love Christ and the Virgin Mary had, and the imagery that it is trying to bring forth is that of Christ resting his head and dozing in his mother's lap. Then the hunters who kill the unicorn, they represent the betrayal that Christ faced when he was given to the Romans and crucified.

Despite the grisly images that killing a unicorn might bring to a modern day person and the perverseness of the idea that killing a unicorn can be used to symbolize Mary's love for Christ; people centuries ago did not have the same shyness about the subject. In fact, back in olden times, killing unicorns was highly glamorized and immortalized. An example of the glamorization of killing a unicorn can still be found in the famous unicorn tapestry *The Hunt of the Unicorn* in the Cloister Museum in New York.

Interestingly enough, in *The Hunt of the Unicorn* the first part of the tapestry is devoted to showing the hunt, the struggle between the unicorn and hunters and even showing the hunters stabbing the unicorn. Yet, the very last depiction of *The Hunt of the Unicorn* is of a unicorn trapped in a pen, very much alive. The fact that the tapestry is titled *The Hunt of the Unicorn* and shows hunters doing serious damage to a unicorn, yet having the unicorn seemingly unharmed by the end of the sequence has perplexed scholars for centuries. Though there are a few theories as to why the artist chose to depict the unicorn as healthy and whole at the end of the sequence. Though, one of the leading theories of why the unicorn is healthy at the end of the tapestry is because of the animal's healing powers, and thus all the damage done by the hunters was quickly mended

Now, despite the fact that using a maiden to kill a unicorn is the most popular way to kill or capture a unicorn, it is not the only way. The other way of killing a unicorn is to stand

in front of a rock or a tree and entice the animal to charge, but right when the unicorn is about to impale the hunter, the hunter jumps out of the way, and the unicorn gets its head stuck in the tree or rock that the hunter was standing in front of. Then, once the hunter sees that the unicorn is firmly trapped, the hunter will either gore it with a spear or chop off its head.

Over overpowering a unicorn by causing them to get their horns stuck is historically a valid method for killing unicorns and can be found in a complete collection of the second most owned book in America, The Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales. In the Grimm Brother fairy tale *The Valiant Tailor*, the hero of the story, the tailor, uses the technique of disabling a unicorn by getting the unicorn to charge, and jumping out of the way of the stampeding animal in the last moment, causing the unicorn to embed its horn in the tree. (Grimm) Though it is not always humans that employ the mentioned above, method of destroying unicorns, in some cases, it is lions.



The lion and the unicorn
Were fighting for the crown.
The lion beat the unicorn
All about the town.
Some gave them white bread,
And some gave them brown;
Some gave them plum-cake,
And sent them out of town.

The Lions and Unicorns

Both the lion and the unicorn have been described as incredible beasts in mythology and both have been described as kings among the animal kingdom, but in reality, the link between unicorns and lions goes much deeper. Throughout history, lions and unicorns have been adversaries that have always vied for power from each other, the title of king of beast, and there have been many stories and songs connecting these two animals. A few examples of the stories that have arisen from the lion and the unicorn are the stories of how they do battle. One particular good story that relates to unicorns and lions, originated from the Middle East, it goes like this:

[T]he Lion and the Unicorn chased each other across the heavens at the dawn of time. For fourteen years the Lion chased after the Unicorn through the stars, but it pulled away and circled round. Then for the next fourteen years it was the Unicorn who chased the Lion, slowly but steadily gaining, closing the distance between them with its horn growing ever more sharp and deadly. In despair the Lion came to earth and plunged into a forest with the Unicorn close behind, its horn lowered for the kill. Suddenly an enormous tree stood in their path. The Unicorn, seeing the danger too late, charged straight on and buried its horn to the hilt in the tree's trunk. While the Unicorn was thus pinned, the Lion crept up from behind and devoured him.

(The Mystic Unicorn Lady)

This very old tale that is described above shows that unicorns shows that even from ancient times there was a distanced rivalry between the unicorn and the lions. For proof of their rivalry, one merely has to look at the section of the tale that states that for fourteen years the lion chased the unicorn, and then the next fourteen years the unicorn chased the lion. In that brief passage about where they chase each other, the story shows that the lion and unicorn are equal to each other in almost every way and therefore must fight for dominance.

While it may not seem like the lion and the unicorn are equals as the lion wins this fight, one must remember, if it was not due to the lion's luck that there was a tree located near him and the unicorn when they came to earth, the lion would not have killed his adversary. Because of this unique equality that both creatures share, it should be noted that the lion does

not always win his battles with the unicorn; it is just more common for the lion to win. As for why the lion normally wins, and why the unicorn and lion have to fight, has to do with the sun and the moon and with Scotland and England.

Because the lion is golden in color and has a powerful presence, and the unicorn is silver or white, many people have attributed the personas of the golden sun and the silver moon to these creatures. Also, another reason why unicorns have been connected to the moon, is because unicorn of the Greek Goddess Artemis. The ancient Greeks believed Artemis to be the goddess of the moon, maiden and the hunt, and because of her link with the hunt, her lore developed a strong connection between her and the place where unicorns dwell—the woodlands. So, as one can see, while there may not be any literary texts that pertain to both Artemis and the unicorn, they both symbolize woodlands, and maidens. Therefore, it is no surprise that over the years, people have connected unicorns with all with the all three aspect Artemis, and made them beautiful silver beast that represent the moon.

Now that it has been established that the unicorn and the lion are respectfully connected to the moon and sun, a new question arises about the equality of each animal. Because, if the lion and the unicorn represent the sun and the moon, two objects that cannot eliminate each other in real life, then why is there usually a victor in the battles between the unicorn and the lion, and why is it the lion who is usually the victor? Surely if neither the sun nor the moon can overtake each other in the battle for dominance in the hours of dawn or twilight, the answer to why the lion is the more common victor against the unicorn cannot be found here. Instead, one has to look to the far off land of Scotland for any hope of an answer.

Before England conquered Scotland, it was still a place of pagan forest and moon worshiping pagans, who used the unicorn as one of their symbols. While in England, the lion

was the symbol of the throne; therefore, when England overtook Scotland, the lion literally overtook the unicorn. Thus, making true the song of the lion overtaking the unicorn in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*:

The lion and the unicorn
 Were fighting for the crown
 The lion beat the unicorn
 All around the town.
 Some gave them white bread,
 And some gave them brown;
 Some gave them plum cake
 and drummed them out of town.
 (221)

As well as Gaiman's version of the poem in *Stardust*:

The lion and the unicorn
 Were fighting for the crown
 The lion beat the unicorn
 All around the town.
 He beat him once
 He beat him twice
 With all his might and main
 He beat him three times over
 His power to maintain
 (152-3)

As one can see from the poems above, the lion and the unicorn are fighting for the crown of the kingdom, and much like what happened in actual history, England won the battle and thus conquered the unicorn—Scotland. Therefore, the question of why the unicorn normally loses to the lion is solved, and as can be seen, the answer has nothing to do with the sun, and moon symbolism that each animal has. Instead, the answer lies with a recount of history, and the lion and the unicorn are merely proxies for the countries of Scotland and England.



*Traits of
the Unicorn*

Now that the origin and shaping of the unicorn has been intensely examined, it is time to look at some of the lore and magical properties that have become connected with the unicorns. According to the surveys that accompanied this unicorn project, most people that were acquainted with the concept of magical powers or the lore of the unicorn thought that unicorns had healing powers and could purify water. Though surprisingly, most people that took the survey stated that they thought unicorn blood would put a curse on the one who drank it. The idea that unicorn blood is cursed seems to be a popular notion that was created by pop culture from fantasy television series and movies, such as BBC's *Merlin* and *Harry Potter*. Though interestingly enough, in neither *Merlin* nor *Harry Potter* is it mentioned that drinking the blood of a unicorn will lay a curse upon the drinker. Instead, in both *Merlin* and *Harry Potter*, it was the act of killing the unicorn that laid the curse upon the victim.

Additionally, it should be noted that in both series, the unicorns are of the Christian variety, which makes them pure, noble, and a symbol of Christ. Therefore, when Arthur and Voldemort killed their unicorns, they were in a sense murdering Christ. It was with their sin of murdering the innocent that the curse was laid upon them.

Also, it was interesting that despite the feminine traits that have been attributed to the unicorn in recent years, the general public did not seem to know that unicorns could walk on flowers and not break a single one. Though, the fact that most of the survey participants did not know about the unicorn's ability to walk without breaking the ground that it stepped on is not actually surprising. The unicorn's ability to walk on ground without leaving tracks is a power that the Asian unicorns developed over time, and is not of European/Christian unicorn lore. Furthermore, the fact that Asian unicorns are so different from European unicorns in

powers and appearance might also have something to do with the lack of information that the percipients had on Asian unicorns.

Chinese unicorns (otherwise known as Ki-Lins) are very different from European unicorns; in fact, someone that was not told that they were unicorns might think that they are entirely different creatures altogether. Some of the traits that differentiate the Ki-Lin from the iconic European unicorn are the abilities to walk on the ground without leaving a mark, and the concept that they are not fierce, but peaceful, (Niggs 87). Moreover, the general appearance of the Ki-Lin differs greatly from that of the European unicorn.

The European unicorn is described as being the size of a large horse, having a three-foot spiral horn protruding from the center of its skull and has the temperament of a strong and noble beast. While the Ki-Lin has no fixed size, and is described as being anywhere from as small as a goat to as large as an elephant. Though the largest difference between Ki-Lin and the European unicorns is their coats; as stated above, European unicorns have white coats, but Asian unicorns do not. In fact, the Ki-Lin's hides can be any color imaginable. Then finally, the last difference between the Ki-Lin and the iconic unicorn is that the Ki-Lin has an antler protruding from the center of its skull instead of a horn. (Unicorn Lady).

Despite the lack of information that the average American contained on Asian unicorns, it is nothing compared to the lack of knowledge that the subjects possessed on any of the ancient tales of unicorns. Overall, the information on ancient tales or stories that the average American possessed on unicorns was pitiful. When asked if the subjects knew of any tales or stories about unicorns most referred to the 1980s movie, *The Last Unicorn, My Little Pony* or could not recall any at all. Though, interestingly enough, even though most of the

subjects could not recall any specific ancient tales unicorns, they were still aware of the unicorn hunts because of the famous unicorn tapestries in the Cloister museum in New York.

The last trait that will be discussed is that of the alicorn, also known as the unicorn's horn. The most notable power that alicorn was said to have was the power to detect poison and cure poison. To employ this ability to cure poison, alicorns were normally fashioned into cups that were said to cleanse poison. However, when one wanted to use the alicorn as a poison detection device, the alicorn would be fashioned into a knife that was said to sweat when poison was near (Shepard 60). Another use of the alicorn was the ability to cure epilepsy, though to use it for this purpose, one had to go to the local physician, buy the powder of an alicorn and drink it. Also, according to the surveys, another power that has of the alicorn that seems to have arisen out of popular culture is the idea, that the alicorn can heal light wounds.

When asked how to administer the healing abilities of the unicorn's horn, the subject interestingly enough thought that alicorn were not fashioned into cups to cure poison. Instead, the subjects thought that all one has to do to cure poison with a unicorn horn was to touch whatever needed to be decontaminated with the tip of the alicorn. Despite the subject's lack of knowledge on how the healing and cleansing properties were said to have worked, the subjects surprisingly had many theories about what the alicorn was made out of.

Most of the subjects thought that when traders sold their alicorn horns to the nobility, that it was narwhal horns that they were selling. Which indeed is true, as many "unicorn horns" that can to this day be found in royal treasuries and museums in Europe have been studied and indeed proven to be narwhal horns. Also, interestingly enough, almost none of the subjects believed that any of the potions that were said to contain alicorn were made from

rhinoceros horns, which is an interesting fact, since the first account of a unicorn having healing properties probably came from rhinoceros horns and their medicinal properties. Sadly though, there is no way to tell what the powders that 'made from alicorns' were made from. Though there is a rumor that the physicians made their alicorn powders from any readily available items (such as animal bones, teeth and toenail clippings) that would produce a white powder when ground.

Conclusion

Overall, it would seem that modern Americans have nearly no knowledge of the origins of the unicorn, nor of many ancient tales, and the tales that are known to the common American, are uncertainly recalled. Furthermore, it seems that most of the subjects were most familiar with the concept of the iconic unicorn, yet they do not realize that it is highly connected to Jesus Christ or that it was not the original interpretation of the unicorn. Though despite the modern American's lack of information on the roots and original interpretation of the unicorn, it seems the Judo-Christen unicorn's features still remain strong in the mind of the average person, for when asked about the healing magic of the unicorn, almost all subjects seemed to be familiar with the idea.

It should also be noted that, even though modern Americans are not normally formally taught about unicorns, all subjects knew what these creatures were. Though the fact that the subjects got so many specifics on unicorns incorrect shows that the ancient tales and stories of the unicorns are not where people of the 21st century are receiving their information. However, the fact that the subject even knew about unicorns in a feat in itself and shows that the unicorn lore is still alive, and even more importantly evolving and not dying off.

Moreover, according to the surveys, most subjects did not believe in unicorns that had magical powers, rather, they thought that the first account of the unicorn was started by a faulty account of a real animal, such a horse or goat. Now, knowing that most people do not believe in unicorns, one has to ask, why has the lore and memory of unicorns survived? Well, for this question, there are only a few good theories.

The first theory is that as long as the origin of the unicorn is unknown, seekers of the truth will not rest until they find the undeniable truth of how unicorns came into being. A good example of how the intellectuals have kept unicorn lore alive is through their search to

find unicorn like creatures, such as the one antlered Italian deer. The one antlered Italian deer is a faun that was born on a nature preserve with one antler coming out of the center of its forehead. Italian scientists say that the deer was born naturally and that its one antler is a deformity that was not induced by man.

Though, if one wants a personal explanation as to why a civilized Western culture that does not even believe in the unicorns still remembers them, one merely has to look at the answer that the Unicorn Lady has come up with. According to the Unicorn Lady, unicorns are an important part of her and many others lives because they represent the innocent and purity that people lose as they grow old:

Unicorns are the antithesis of the person I am now. Perhaps that is the very reason why I find myself drawn to them. They embody so many attributes I wish I could call my own: innocence, gentleness, magic, wisdom. Especially the innocence, I believe Amazingly, in one of the unicorn books I own, I discovered a statement by the author that he believes that sexually abused children are initially attracted to the unicorn's healing aspects. (Unicorn Lady)

Despite the fact Unicorn Lady's theory seems to be a bit depressive, it seems that it is a leading theory that many agree with. One such person that agrees with the Unicorn Lady is Bruce Coville, an author who writes fantasy tales on traditional Judo-Christen unicorns:

My guess is that we seek them {unicorns} not merely for their beauty, even though they are more than beautiful enough. I think they call to our hearts so strongly because they represent something sadly lost; their very presence sings of the ancient wonder pervading the natural world, a sense of wonder hard to hold in these modern times. Underlying our desire for unicorns, I suspect, is a longing for purity, a memory of magic, an aching need to recover innocence. In their horns, their eyes, their very being, they carry the hope of healing, the promise of grace (Coville viii).

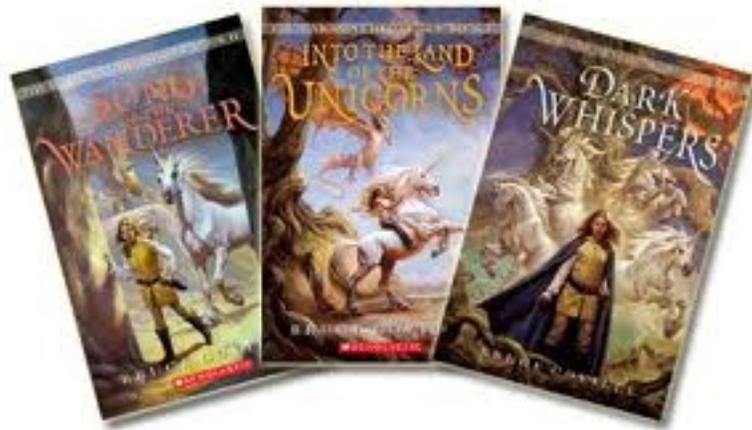
If one were to agree with Coville and the Unicorn Lady, unicorns will always be a part of the human cultures as they have come to represent the innocents and wonder that most people lose when they become adults. Though in all honesty, the answer to why unicorns

have survived the ages is probably a combination of all of the theories listed above. Because it would be unlikely that any one reason is enough to keep the memory of the unicorn alive in the minds and imaginations of people across the globe when both science, logic and common sense consider the animal to be more than improbable.

Appendix: Pictures



Example of Unicorns in Modern Society (Black and White Unicorns)



Unicorns in Modern Media (Unicorn book covers)



Sunstar the unicorn with wings from *Princess Gwenevere and the Jewel Riders*



Twilight Sparkle from *My Little Pony*



Example of Iconic Unicorn (*Virgin and Unicorn*)



Example of Unicorn Tapestry (The Hunt of the Unicorn)



Example of Asian Unicorn (Asian Unicorn)



Example of Asian Unicorn (Chinese Unicorn)



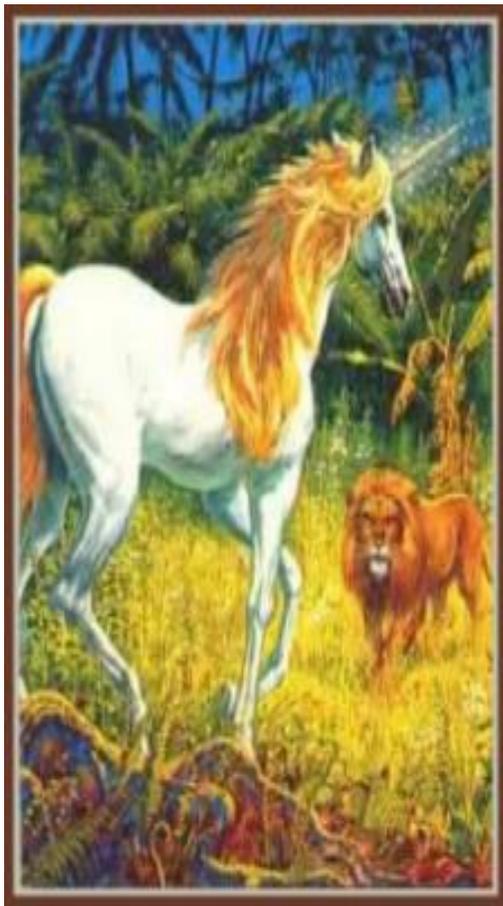
Picture of Narwhal and its “Unicorn Horn” (Unicorns Are Real)



Alicorn Knife (Unicorn Horn Antler Primitive Knife Athame with Mother of Pearl Parrot and Jay Feathers Rendezvous Mountain Man)



Example of an Italian Roe Deer Born with one Horn (Unicorn Deer)



Lion stalking Unicorn

Alice with the Unicorn and Lion from Through the Looking-Glass

*Appendix: Survey
Example*

Where are you from?

1. U.S
 2. South America
 3. Europe
 4. Asia
 5. Other (Please Specify)
-

How old are you?

- 5-10
- 11-15
- 16-21
- 22-30
- 30+

How did you first learn about unicorns?

What do you think their horn is made out of?

1. Gold
 2. Pearl
 3. Silver
 4. Crystal
 5. Bone
 6. Other
-

What type of hoofs do you think they have?

1. Solid horse hoofs
 2. Cloven deer hooves
 3. Other
-

What is their coat like?

1. Do they have they pure white fur?
 2. Pure black fur?
 3. Red fur?
 4. Do they have scales?
 5. Other
-

How big are they?

1. Normal horse size
2. Large horse size

3. Small like a deer
 4. Big like a rhino
 5. Other
-

Are there any particular stories about unicorns that you know of?

1. No
 2. Yes(if yes, pleas specify/ give title of story)
-

What are some of their magic powers that you know of?

1. Healing horn?
 2. Good luck?
 3. Peaceful aura?
 4. Healing blood?
 5. Other
-

How do you think the legends of the unicorn got started?

Do you believe they exist?

1. Yes
2. No

Do you believe that non-magical unicorns were real animals at one time and went extinct?

1. Yes
2. No

Is there an animal that you think inspired the myth of the unicorn?

1. No
 2. Yes (If yes state what animal)
-

By signing and printing your name on the line below you or allowing this survey to appear in and educational work.

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