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## **The Mammals of Iraq**

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skeletons of modern wild and domestic mammals of Iraq is sorely needed to aid in identification of bones recovered in the course of archeological excavations.

## THE MAMMALS

### The Vanishing Fauna

Iraq is one of the longest-occupied lands and one of the first to develop villages and communities. The records of man's relation to the fauna are extensive and some are very old. About 100,000 years ago men at Barda Balka appear to have eaten rhinoceros and elephant. Deposits in the caves of Hazar Mard in Kurdistan reveal that Paleolithic man of 25,000 years ago ate deer, gazelle, and goat. Studies of other long-occupied caves of Kurdistan which are not yet fully published will extend this record, and the interested reader should particularly watch for further publications by Reed, Solecki, and Fraser.

At Jarmo, a village site of about 6700 B.C., figurines or bones indicate domestication of dogs and goats. In the fourth and third millennia before Christ the Sumerians of lower Iraq left fine representations of both wild and domestic animals. The earliest document listing animals was a Babylonian record of which late Assyrian copies have been studied (Landsberger, 1934; Oppenheim and Hartman, 1945). From this time to the middle of the first millennium B.C. there are many records, both written and pictorial, of what was happening to the large animals of Mesopotamia. The boastful records of the great hunts of the Assyrian kings, which certainly hastened the extermination of some of the big animals, are cited in the present report. Unfortunately, except for Xenophon's account of wild asses on the plains of the Euphrates during the campaign of 401 B.C., there are, so far as I know, no records of animals from about 500 B.C. to the middle of the nineteenth century A.D., when the reports of the Euphrates expedition (Ainsworth; Chesney), the archeologist Layard, and the travels of Lady Anne Blunt ushered in an era of new interest in this area and its animal life.

Although one may be grateful for scattered and fragmentary data from a period of some 25,000 years, they are woefully inadequate to reconstruct the history of any one species in Mesopotamia. Nevertheless, we do know that there were destructive influences from the time man first came into the region. They became accelerated as he developed hunting skills and weapons. As agricultural activities reduced the wild lands of the valleys many wild animals must have been crowded out or destroyed because of their depredations to crops. With the development of the great city-states, and the introduction of the riding horse and the chariot, large animals had an ever poorer opportunity to escape. The Assyrian records suggest that the royal hunts were, like the better documented Asiatic hunts of later centuries, great game drives with enormous slaughter. Assur-nasir-pal II boasted in the ninth century B.C. of taking 450 lions, 390 wild bulls, 30 elephants, 200 ostriches, and more. He had it recorded that he gave a feast at which the menu included over 1,000 cattle, 15,000 sheep, 500 deer,

and 500 gazelles as well as vegetables, fruits, and beer. Even when such bragging is discounted we can be sure that wildlife was rapidly being exterminated. As firearms came into general use in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, still more game disappeared. In this period, too, the destruction of forests in Kurdistan was accelerated and grazing areas were overrun by sheep and goats.

At present in Iraq all game is hard put to find food or refuge. The deserts are now traversed by fast-moving cars, and in them the hunters, equipped with high-powered rifles, and even, occasionally, with machine guns, give the gazelles and other desert animals little quarter. Public opinion in Iraq is not yet ready to support effective protection and indeed, where the human population pressure is so great, there is little chance to give adequate protection through establishment of preserves. Neither the mountains nor the open deserts can be effectively patrolled.

The first animals to become extinct in Iraq disappeared before the time of maximum development of agriculture and one may suspect that climatic changes or destruction of food resources by herds of sheep and goats were as important factors of extermination as were mass hunting activities. Of other once abundant species only a few stragglers remain in isolated sections. The evidence for the existence of some species reported for the area of modern Iraq is so meager that one cannot be sure the species were ever part of the indigenous fauna.

#### Extinct Animals

The animals listed below are arranged in approximate order of their disappearance.

*Rhinoceros*: Known only by a tooth from the Paleolithic site of Barda Balka and by later sculptural representations which are probably of animals from India.

*Bison*: The existence of bison in the region of Iraq is presumptive; there are several accurate depictions of it on cylinder seals and pottery from about 4000 to 2000 B.C. In historic times there are no records for the bison nearer than the Caucasus Mountains.

*Siva's giraffe*: There is meager evidence that *Sivatherium* existed in Iraq in the Paleolithic and as late as 3500 B.C.

*Water buffalo*: Although the evidence is not conclusive that the water buffalo was indigenous to Mesopotamia, the wild type was frequently portrayed until about 2100 B.C. at which time it presumably became extinct.

*Elephant*: There appear to have been elephants in Iraq in the late Pleistocene, as evidenced by two teeth. In 1464 B.C. in western Syria the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III hunted elephants for their ivory. The accounts of several Assyrian kings (circa 1100-800 B.C.) tell of elephant hunts which were presumably along the Euphrates but not certainly in Iraq. After that time there is no record of elephants in the region.

*Wild cattle*: Bones and representations of wild cattle are abundant in archeological sites from the Paleolithic to the ninth century B.C., but

## PERISSODACTYLA

## Rhinocerotidae

*Rhinoceros unicornis* Linnaeus

## Indian one-horned rhinoceros

*Rhinoceros unicornis* Linnaeus, *Syst. Nat.*, ed. 10, 1 (1758): 56. *Type locality*: "Probably the sub-Himalayan Tarai of Assam" (Lydekker, 1916, 5: 48).

The indications that the rhinoceros was indigenous to Mesopotamia consist, as far as I can determine, of three records: the finding of a single lower cheek tooth of a rhinoceros at Barda Balka (*in litt.*, F. C. Fraser to R. J. Braidwood, July 16, 1952) where an elephant molar was also found; the depiction of an Indian rhino on the seal from Tel Asmar that shows an Indian elephant and a crocodile (Frankfort, 1955: 45); and the Black Obelisk figure.

The Barda Balka site, at which Acheulean and Mousterian types of artifacts occur, was interpreted by Wright (1952: 12) as having been occupied at the very beginning of the last (Würm) of the four glacial stages of the Pleistocene and is of great antiquity. Palestine, in the late Pleistocene, had rhinoceros in its fauna. Bate (1937: 221) reported remains in caves of Mt. Carmel, and Vaufrey (1951: 199) recorded a tooth from upper Acheulean deposits. These findings are, however, referred to other species: *Rhinoceros merki* and *R. cf. hemitoechus*. The rhinoceros tooth from Barda Balka may also be from an extinct species, and may indeed have been carried far. The Tel Asmar seal was evidently carried from the Indus valley. The Black Obelisk of the ninth century B.C. shows a procession of animals being sent to Shalmaneser III in tribute. One animal is probably intended as a rhinoceros; the others are an elephant, a Bactrian camel, a nilgai, a bull, and three monkeys.

Thus, there is at present no evidence to show that the rhinoceros was part of the Iraq fauna after the time of Barda Balka.

## Equidae

*Equus hemionus hemippus* I. Geoffroy

Onager, Syrian wild ass; wahash ("the wild one"), razali (Arab.); akhdar; dziggetai, ghar-khor (in India).

*Equus hemippus* I. Geoffroy, *C. R. Acad. Sci.* [Paris], 41 (1856): 1214. *Type locality*: Syrian Desert between Palmyra and Baghdad.

The little wild ass, or onager, which was broken to harness by the Sumerians before the advent of the horse, is almost surely extinct in Iraq, a victim of modern guns. Perhaps the earliest historic reference to it is by Xenophon (1949 transl.: 36), who reported encountering large herds of these animals during the military campaign of 401 B.C., across the flat desert bordering the Euphrates in what is now eastern Iraq. By the time of the British Euphrates expedition (1835-37) the wild ass must have been