THE LION AND THE BULL: AN INQUIRY ON TWO ANIMAL SYMBOLS IN EARLY BUDDHISM

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ARTICLE INFO

Research Article

Keywords
Animal Symbolism, Buddhism, Lion, Bull, Urbanization in Buddhism, Early Buddhism

Received:
July 1, 2023

Revised:
August 16, 2023

Accepted:
August 18, 2023

ABSTRACT

This article delves into the complex realm of animal symbolism within the context of Buddhism, examining in particular the representations of the lion and the bull as they relate to the broader Indian cultural heritage and their roles in societal establishment. Drawing from anthropological studies and historical narratives, this paper investigates the possible meanings behind these symbols: the lion is shown to embody the virtues of the Buddha, while the bull represents the efficacy of yogic meditation techniques. The origins of these symbols are traced back to Mesopotamian and Vedic influences, where the lion signifies royal power and the bull embodies fertility harnessed for human interest, while the symbol of the bull/ox could in turn indicate ancient origins and connections to the Mesopotamian world, which however flow into Buddhism in the form of memories of ancient ascetic practices, perhaps proto-yogic, as well as remembrances of founding processes of society involving agriculture, urbanization and the structuring of the powers of the sovereign and the priest. Additionally, the transformation of these symbols within Buddhism highlights their evolution into tools for spiritual transcendence and cognitive discipline. The juxtaposition of these symbols illustrates the delicate balance between authority and dissent, as well as the interplay between urban and wilderness dynamics. Ultimately, the article suggests that the lion and bull archetypes offer insights into the development of Buddhism, its stance on societal norms, and its pursuit of spiritual liberation within the constraints of urban existence.

JIBS JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL BUDDHIST STUDIES

Introduction

Animal symbolism is a multifaceted topic within anthropological studies, within the context of Buddhism, and numerous instances of animal representations can be observed. These encompass a range of creatures, including the horse, peacock, snake, and elephant, which are not only significant in Buddhism but also hold broader importance in Indian cultural heritage. Additionally, mythological beings like Garuḷa contribute to this rich tapestry of animal symbolism. While an exhaustive exploration of all animal figures within the ancient Buddhist landscape is beyond the scope of this study, two specific creatures have captured author's attention: the lion and the bull. Rather than undertaking a strictly historical or philological analysis of these figures, the author's objective is to comprehend the utilization of these symbols to represent distinct concepts. The lion embodies the virtues associated with the Buddha, while the bull represents the efficacy of yogic meditation techniques. This hypothesis stems from a combination of philological research and philosophical reflections, drawing from the historical narrative that sheds light on the development of meditation practices and the ascetic figure as a prototype for the Buddha.

Fig. 1 – A relief from the Amarāvati Stūpa.
Here it is possible to observe lions guarding the sacred relic.

Many parts of the Sutta Nipāta (like Snp 4 and 5 among others) as well as Udānas and Itivuttakas are counted among the Buddhist texts with the most archaic features and are perhaps evidence of the oldest forms of the doctrine.[1] I prefer not to engage in the philological debate at hand; therefore, let us accept this statement prima facie. It is worth noting that both lion and

[1] Bhikkhu Anālayo, "The Historical Value of the Pāli Discourses," *Indo-Iranian Journal* 55 (2012): 224-226. Vetter Tilmann, *The Ideas and Meditative Practices of Early Buddhism*, (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 101-106; Andrew G. Salomon, *A Gāndhārī Version of the Rhinoceros Sutra: British Library Kharoṣṭhi Fragment 5B*, (USA: University of Washington Press, 2000); Neekee Chaturvedi, "The literary characteristics of the Sutta Nipāta," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 70 (2009); Rudolf Hoernle, "The Sutta Nipāta in a Sanskrit Version from Eastern Turkestan," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 48 (1916).

bull figures are indeed present in the Nikāyas. However, the author encourages the reader to scrutinize their portrayal in the Sutta Nipāta.[2] To illustrate this point, let us examine the following verse.

In Snp 5.1 the Buddha is revered as a son of the Sakya and a light-bringer (*sakyaputto pabhaṅkaro*). Among many other epithets such as world-protector (*lokanātha*), world-leader (*lokanāyaka*), turner of the wheel (*cakkavattin*) – an epithet anciently connected with the royal role as "Universal Monarch"[3] – and victorious (*jina*), here we find also two animal metaphors: "the son of the Sakyans, indefatigable, he's a knower of the head's division, a bull among men"[4] (*so sakyaputto vidhuro anāsavo, muddhādhipātassa vidū narāsabho*), and also: "like a lion roaring in the jungle the Buddha was teaching the mendicants the Dhamma" (*bhikkhūnaṃ dhammaṃ deseti, sīhova nadatī vane*).

The objective of this paper will be to propose a hypothesis asserting that the aforementioned animals assume a distinctive symbolic function within the context of Buddhism due to their association with the phenomenon of the urban revolution as addressed in previous studies,[5] thus providing further elements in support of that hypothesis by deepening the figures of the bull and the lion in the Buddhist context. Various facets can be identified in support of the correlation between Buddhism and the urban revolution, with certain aspects being subject to more contentious interpretations than others. For example, the role of the merchant class is problematic: on the one hand, Buddhism is clearly opposed to "commercial values";[6] on the other hand, an emerging economy may have enabled social mobility that the brāhmaṇical order refused to allow.[7] Buddhism strictly rejected social hierarchies and caste

[2] There are several reasons to consider this collection of texts, and in particular sections 4 and 5 of the Snp (namely: *Aṭṭhakavagga* and *Pārāyanavagga*) as very old, see Federico Divino, "An Anthropological Outline of the Sutta Nipāta: The Contemplative Experience in Early Buddhist Poetry," *Religions* 14 (2023a).

[3] James Apple, "Eschatology and world order in Buddhist formations," *Religious Studies and Theology* 29 (2010): 112.

[4] The term *muddhādhipāta* here is likely a compound of *muddhā* (< *mūrdhan*) meaning the head or the summit, and *adhipāta*, which indicates a destruction, a splitting (*adhipāteti*).

[5] Federico Divino, "Reaching the End of the World: An Anthropological Reading of Early Buddhist Medicine and Ascetic Practices," *Religions* 14 (2023b).

[6] Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 18.

[7] In Buddhism we see an ambiguous positioning regarding castes. We have already seen that the ascetic movements rejected the hierarchical order, but it is also true that of all the social roles, the brāhmaṇic one was the most rejected. Surely, "The old brāhmaṇical culture was, at least in the early period of urbanization, antipathetic to city life" (Ibid., 19). After all, Buddha came from the *kṣatriya* caste, and most of the symbols adopted from ancient Buddhism are inversions of the cultural insignia of kingship (*rājanya*). A few examples of this: in the Rājasūya rite, the final phase sanctioning the *yajamāna*'s conquest of the world is the turning of the wheel, and the Buddha himself is identified as *cakkavatti*. The wheel of the law (*dhammacakka*) is a clear allusion to the Vedic use of the term *dharma*, which indicates royal power, cf. Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), 26. Buddhist disciples are called *ariya-sāvaka*, which refers to the term 'noble' (*ārya*) that Indo-Aryans gave themselves in the Vedas. Buddhism also parodies the institution of sacrifice, rejecting the killing of humans and animals and speaking rather of a symbolic sacrifice summed up in the figure of the Buddha, see Johannes Bronkhorst, "Buddhism and sacrifice," *Asiatische Studien/Études Asiatiques* 66 (2012): 7-17). In Snp 5.4, the utility of sacrifice (*yañña*) is denigrated, and *kṣatriyas* and *brāhmaṇas* are accused to rely on it to gain benefits but are not freed from true evils: that is, the trap of *saṃsāra*. Some also saw in Early Buddhism a protest against the centralized or autocratic power (Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, 21-22) but this can only be one aspect of the question.

divisions, and the problems of such an order are most evident in heavy urbanization. Money, however, is part of worldliness, and consequently the Buddhist community had forbidden commercial activities.[8]

Nevertheless, the city serves not only as a hub for commercial transactions but also as a locus of normative authority that governs intricate social structures. Throughout the development of human civilization, contemplation of the city's function as the demarcation between organized society and an untamed external realm has persisted. Frequently, animals are employed as the central figures in metaphors and myths that elucidate the nature of the city, as they inhabit the wilderness beyond its boundaries. However, certain animals have transcended this threshold by becoming domesticated and coexisting alongside humans. Within Indian dietary customs, a classical normative division aligned precisely with the confines of the urban domain can still be discerned: animals residing closer to the village, either within it or having long been integrated into human society, assume an enigmatic status. The horse and the cow, revered as sacred entities, exemplify this classification and consequently are deemed inedible. Nevertheless, the horse is also killable in one of the most sacred rituals in Vedic culture (*aśvamedha*). Similarly, animals that are too wild, living too far from the city, are equally inedible. The eatable animals are therefore the border animals, neither too far nor too close to man.[9] Also, in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa, "we find that the forest which surrounds the site of a sacrifice is a haunt of dangerous powers natural and unnatural – ogres, man-tigers, thieves, murderers and robbers –, and some sacrifices are said to be able to annihilate the wilderness tracts separating villages".[10]

Among the various animals discussed, the lion and the bull hold significant symbolic significance. The lion is commonly associated with royalty, representing the capacity to govern by means of authoritative power, which signifies the transformation and sublimation of the lion's inherently violent strength. Conversely, the bull is closely linked to fertility and the nurturing qualities of the earth. Its strength is harnessed to facilitate agricultural practices, thereby enabling the sustenance and progress of civilization. Notably, creatures like *Bos taurus* and *Bos indicus* are frequently depicted on ancient Indus seals, underscoring their recurring presence in that context.[11] Without these two powers, government and fertility, society cannot exist. Buddhists seem aware of this ancient legacy and play with the figures of the bull and the lion. The bull in particular falls within the circle of those 'useful animals', whose subservience to man is functional to his own sustenance. The lion, on the other hand, serves a more symbolic

[8] Ibid., 18
[9] Patrick Olivelle, *Chapter 9: Caste and Purity in Collected Essays,* (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2008), 240–241.
[10] Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, 145-146.
[11] Andrew Robinson, *The Indus*, (London: Reakiton, 2015), 82.

function, given his strength. As early as the Mesopotamian world,[12] these animals appear frequently, either as androcephalous or anthropomorphized, thus crossing the boundary separating them from humanity. But we also often see them enslaved to humans, who channel their strength and exploit their power. This peculiar balance of power is found in a plastic way in a Proto-Elamite seal impression from Susa, with lions and wild bulls dominating each other in turn.[13]

To *yoke* the vitality of the bull, to *subjugate* the strength of the lion

Two animals of significant cross-cultural symbolic importance, believed to have origins in the Mesopotamian heritage of the Indus Valley civilization, subsequently assimilated by the Indo-Aryans, serve as guiding symbols for the representation of a tangible social process: the urbanization in India during the time of the Buddha. This process involved the transformation of a society into a model that questioned hierarchical structures and cognitive categorization. While Buddhism offers a philosophically intricate and diverse message, characterized by a profound analysis of thought and cognition, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential historical impetus behind the development of such profound thinking.

During the 2600 B.C. there lived in the Indus Valley a civilization known by various names. Since we have not deciphered their writing to this day, we can only rely on the analysis of their artifacts and the ruins of their cities. However, we can be sure that there was a lively exchange, if not a cultural connection, between the Indus Valley civilization and the Mesopotamian ones.[14] The proven intensive sea trade which started roughly from the time of Sargon I,[15] and the artistic similarity of these artifacts are a more than clear indication of this intense cultural exchange.[16] In both groups (the Mesopotamian civilizations and the Indus Valley cities) we find representations of animals, including bulls and lions: "The lion and the bull are both represented also as the king's adversaries in the late Uruk hunting scenes. In proto-Elamite seals, we come across a new variant of the 'contest' motif in which the lion and the bull are each other's adversaries".[17] From the Indus Valley, however, come several seals with theriomorphic individuals with taurine horns, often surrounded by other animals and assuming

[12] Sadreddin Taheri, "The prototype of Lion in Ancient Iran, Mesopotamia & Egypt," *Honar-Ha-Ye-Ziba: Honar-Ha-Ye-Tajassomi* 4 (2012).

[13] Asko Parpola, *Iconographic Evidence of Mesopotamian Influence on Harappan Ideology and Its Survival in the Royal Rites of the Veda and Hinduism*, (UK: Oxford Archaeopress Publishing, 2020), 186-187; Asko Parpola, *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), 238.

[14] Asko Parpola, *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization*, 38.

[15] Asko Parpola, *Iconographic Evidence of Mesopotamian Influence on Harappan Ideology and Its Survival in the Royal Rites of the Veda and Hinduism*, 183.

[16] Eric Olijdam and Richard H. Spoor, *Intercultural Relations between South and Southwest Asia: Studies in Commemoration of E.C.L. During Caspers (1934-1996)*, (UK: BAR Publishing, 2008).

[17] Asko Parpola, *Iconographic Evidence of Mesopotamian Influence on Harappan Ideology and Its Survival in the Royal Rites of the Veda and Hinduism*, 186.

a clearly yogic posture.[18] This is by no means a simple comfortable posture, but rather these strange individuals point their feet to the ground, as in *mūlabandhāsana*, suggesting that these civilizations may have had some form of yoga-like body technique.[19] The arrival of the Indo-Aryans leads to evidence of peoples who had already settled in the Indus Valley, who were despised by the Vedic culture, and among whom some representatives can be seen practicing ascetic forms of forest exile or other practices.[20] Although the Vedic world later assimilated this culture to re-shape it into a form of orthodox asceticism (*saṃnyāsa*), it must be said that this type of ascetic culture was long hostile to the Vedic world and became the basis for the *śramaṇa*, the ascetic movements that opposed Vedic authority (*nāstika*) by proposing other cultural and philosophical models.[21]

Fig. 2 – An anthropomorphized bull cross-legged, artifact of probable Elamite origin.[22]

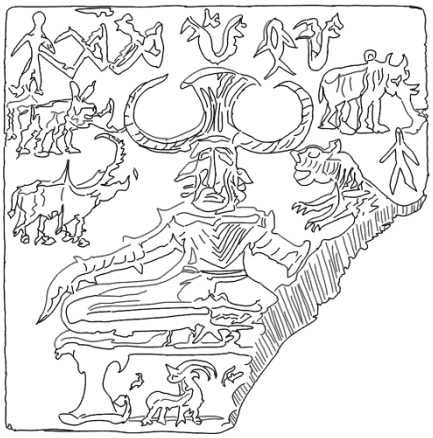

Fig. 3 – The *Paśupati Seal*, also known as Seal #420 or M-304 A.

The representation of the bull elicits profound contemplation on the subject of yogic practice. Within these depictions, we encounter figures that possess theriomorphic qualities, adorned with taurine horns, and often characterized by their phallic attributes. These individuals are typically depicted alongside animals and are situated in clearly discernible

[18] The most famous one is the Seal #420 which is comparable with the Seal #222, both representing a theriomorphic subject (equipped with taurine horns), surrounded by animals in the former case and in both cases in yogic pose with feet pointed to the ground. Very similar to Seal #222 is Seal #235 representing the same figure. Even more fascinating is a Hindus valley copper plate: plate #1 in Vasant Shinde and Rick J. Willis, "A New Type of Inscribed Copper Plate from Indus Valley (Harappan) Civilization," *Ancient Asia* 5 (2014): 1-10. Here we again find the taurine-horned subject in yogic pose this time surrounded by mysterious, perhaps ritual objects of various kinds. Yan Y. Dhyansky, "The Indus Valley Origin of Yoga Practice," *Artibus Asiae* 48 (1987), 94; Thomas McEvilley, "An archaeology of yoga," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 1 (1981), 45-8; Vasant Shinde and Rick J. Willis, "A New Type of Inscribed Copper Plate from Indus Valley (Harappan) Civilization," 2-7; Asko Parpola, *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization*, 194, 273. In addition to this, we observe in a Triangular prism sealing, see Yan Y. Dhyansky, "The Indus Valley Origin of Yoga Practice," 94; Asko Parpola, *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization*, 181. A subject very similar to the previous ones, in the same yogic pose, with horns, again, resembling a bull, perhaps a buffalo. Same dynamic in the Terracotta tablet H95-2486: Vasant Shinde and Rick J. Willis, "A New Type of Inscribed Copper Plate from Indus Valley (Harappan) Civilization," 6, plate #1. This time the horned theriomorphic ascetic is accompanied by a hunting scene of a bull of his own.

[19] Thomas McEvilley, "An Archaeology of Yoga," 45.

[20] Johannes Bronkhorst, "Buddhism and Sacrifice," 7-17; Patrick Olivelle, *The Āśrama System: The History and Hermeneutics of a Religious Institution*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[21] Federico Squarcini, "Pāṣaṇḍin, Vaitaṇḍika, Vedanindaka and Nāstika: on Criticism, Dissenters and Polemics and the South Asian Struggle for the Semiotic Primacy of Veridiction," *Orientalia Suecana* 60 (2011).

[22] Federico Divino, "Reaching the End of the World: An Anthropological Reading of Early Buddhist Medicine and Ascetic Practices," 10.

yogic postures. The correlation between these seals and yogic practices has sparked extensive scholarly discussions.[23] However, the emergence of recent Elamite findings portraying anthropomorphic bull deities in a cross-legged posture appears to reignite the discourse surrounding the proto-yoga hypothesis of the Indus seals. The presence of phallic symbolism has frequently been associated with fertility, while the significance of the taurine horns in this context remains open to interpretation. Notably, the bull holds a pivotal role in the act of plowing the land, and extensive discourse has been devoted to elucidating the connection between the bull, its plow, its bond with the land, and its subservience to the will of the community. This submission to the yoke that binds the bull to the earth, enabling the provision of sustenance to the people, may well be one of the reasons behind the adoption of the term *yoga* to describe the practice, discipline, and technique that cultivate bodily transcendence of limitations, along with the regulation of impulses and their subjugation to rational volition. Clearly, we are delving into the realm of theoretical speculation, yet it is incontrovertible that the term *yoga*, in its earliest and most ancient usage, prior to its specific association with bodily techniques, connoted the harnessing of a conveyance or a group of individuals, as well as the tethering of an animal to a chariot or an implement.[24] This can perhaps be combined with some poetic expressions that use the bull or ox (*usabha*) to denote a virtuous person. The Buddha himself is often referred to as "a bull among men" (*narāsabhaṃ*). Interestingly, a proto-Elamite seal from Susa has been found with an anthropomorphic bull sitting cross-legged.[25] But recently more significant statuettes have come to light, not of an anthropomorphized bull offering a vase as a gift, but of a strange divinity with human-theriomorphic features, taurine horns and legs, sitting in a yogic pose, that is cross-legged. Other figures of this taurine deity have been published in the article by Desset [26] for the cross-legged bull deity. This figure has also been compared[27] to the seal of the lion and the bull dominating each other, mentioned by Parpola.[28]

It is thus evident that the history of yoga may have several possible explanations. In its earliest phase, long before Buddhism, *yoga* is associated with a particularly rigid notion of asceticism, an austere and rigorous bodily technique in which the act of yoking is a metaphor for the discipline with which the *yogin* dedicates himself to the practice, metaphorically 'separating' himself from the passions and delusions, just as the ox is separated from nature to unite with the earth to be plowed.[29] In English, the verb '*subjugate*' comes from Latin

[23] Andrew Robinson, *The Indus*, 123-124.
[24] Federico Squarcini, *Yogasūtra*, (Turin: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 2015), XIII.
[25] Asko Parpola, *The Roots of Hinduism: The Early Aryans and the Indus Civilization*, 212.
[26] François Desset, Meysam Shahsavari, and Massimo Vidale, "The Marḫašean Two-Faced 'God': New Insights Into the Iconographic and Religious Landscapes of the Halil Rud Valley Civilization and Third Millennium BCE Southeastern Iran," *Journal of Sistan and Baluchistan Studies* 1 (2022): 60-61.
[27] Ibid., 66.
[28] Asko Parpola, *Iconographic Evidence of Mesopotamian Influence on Harappan Ideology and Its Survival in the Royal Rites of the Veda and Hinduism*, 186-187.

subiugatus, past participle of *subiugare* ("to bring under the yoke, subjugate"), a compound of *sub* ("under") + *iugum* ("yoke"). Therefore, the term *iugum*, as well as *yoke*, are all connected to the same proto-indo-european root from which also the Vedic *yuj-* (< *yuga/yoga*) also comes. The term *yoga* denotes both a method, a discipline, and the act of paring and yoking the ox. In the Ṛgveda we find both *yoga* and *yuga* used with the clear meaning of 'yoke' (Ṛgveda 1.151.4 with reference to the ox, and also in 5.46.1). Thought can be yoked or harnessed as well (Ṛgveda 5.81.1; 7.27.1) as a typical act of seers that "assumes a kind of ambition to order, discipline, and methodical proceeding".[30] In the Atharvaveda (6.91.1) the term denotes the trappings of a vehicle or the harnessing of an animal to a wagon.[31] In Mahābhārata 7.155.27-9 the term *yoga* is clearly used to denote a discipline designed to divide one thing from another. It is therefore possible to assume as plausible the idea that the ascetic practice represented by the Harappan artifacts and then inherited and reworked by the Indoarians in a process of assimilation, was symbolically connected to the figure of the bull through this reflection on the subjugation of the fertility power. In fact, two aspects characterize ascetic practice: effort (represented by the root *śram-* in the term *śramaṇa*) and the channeling of otherwise uncontrolled vital energies through a discipline (represented by the practice of yoking-harnessing: *yuj-* > *yoga*). As Parpola points out: "the so-called 'yoga posture' of Harappan anthropomorphic divinities like the famous 'proto-Śiva' of Indus seals and tablets (in particular M-304) is due to influence of proto-Elamite glyptic, for the 'sitting bulls' of proto-Elamite seals offer rather striking parallels".[32]

As far as the lion is concerned, in the Mesopotamian world, this animal is found, for example, in an on a stamp depiction of a subject stopping two felines with the laying on of hands.[33] These kind of seals are connected with the dimension of royal power, where the lion "is the principal motif of the late Early Dynastic and Old Akkadian royal seals", but lions and tigers appear also in the Indus Valley ones: five seals from Mohenjo-daro and six terracotta tables from Harappa presents a standing hero holding back two rearing tigers. The substitution of the lions with the tigers is attributable to an adaptation to the local fauna.[34] Looking closely at the many seals found at Harappa and Mohenjo-daro depicting a person holding two lions or two tigers[35] it is impossible not to notice the similarity to the Uruk-style knife of Jebel el-Arak (Musée du Louvre, AE 11517). The message these representations are meant to convey seems clear: "the king is more powerful than the lion",[36] confirming the figure of the lion as a

[29] Federico Squarcini, *Yogasūtra*, XIV.
[30] Ibid., XIII.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Asko Parpola, *Iconographic Evidence of Mesopotamian Influence on Harappan Ideology and Its Survival in the Royal Rites of the Veda and Hinduism*, 185.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Japat P. Joshi and Asko Parpola, "Corpus of Indus Seals and Inscriptions," *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India* 86 (1987): 1-200.
[36] Asko Parpola, *Iconographic Evidence of Mesopotamian Influence on Harappan Ideology and Its Survival in the Royal Rites of the Veda and Hinduism*, 186.

representation of royal power and the right to rule. Conversely, the bull is as well "another very powerful animal", but it seems to be related more to the sacral dimension, like in a late Uruk seal that "depicts the priest-king hunting the wild bull".[37] Here, then, is where the lion/bull pairing starts in Mesopotamian antiquity, but arrives in the Indian world, and we will find it in Buddhism, symbolizing similar things.

> The Mesopotamian motifs show lions being strangled by a hero, whereas the Indus narratives render tigers being strangled by a figure, sometime clearly males, sometimes ambiguous or possibly female. This motif of a hero or heroine grappling with two wild animals could have been created independently for similar events that may have occurred in Mesopotamia as well as the Indus valley.[38]

The lion and the bull, representing forces at the dawn of society such as royal and religious power, are not only represented as energies at odds with the human being who must 'tame' or 'subjugate' them, but are also forces at odds with each other reciprocally: "both animals are alternatively represented as victorious and defeated or as the killer and the killed" suggesting "a continuous, unending fight is going on between the two".[39] In other representations we find an anthropomorphized bull stopping two lions, and vice versa an anthropomorphized lion against two bulls. Two animals representing symmetrical cosmic forces whose alternation in the universe establishes the order, according to the interpretations of Porada and Pierre Amiet.[40]

If it is true, as Parpola claims, that these Mesopotamian and Harappan symbologies were later adopted by the Indian world, then perhaps Buddhism would also make use of them. In the first centuries A.D., cults of figures such as Durgā, the goddess of war and victory, formerly depicted as killing the buffalo (*mahidaṣa-mardana*), are brought to India from Afghanistan, but this is several centuries after the arrival of the Indians. Buddhism could be the bridge that witnesses the connection between these two phases.[41] In 7000 B.C., when the first farming villages appeared in the Indo-Iranian border area, the figure of the bull was particularly associated with the dimension of fertility because of its connection with agriculture.

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Jonathan M. Kenoyer, *Ancient Cities of the Indus Valley Civilization*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 114.

[39] Asko Parpola, *Iconographic Evidence of Mesopotamian Influence on Harappan Ideology and Its Survival in the Royal Rites of the Veda and Hinduism*, 186.

[40] Ibid.

[41] The Sumerian myth of Gilgamesh also reports in both considerable antiquity, this same pattern. Gilgamesh is a demi-god and king of Uruk. As ruler, it is not surprising that his most famous depiction in the Dur Šarrukin has him subduing a lion. Gilgameš seeks eternal life, but also present on his journey is Enkidu, a beastly figure, depicted with taurine horns, and a representation of uncontrolled energy. The union and friendship of Gilgameš and Enkidu guarantees many successes. Among the interesting episodes we mention the one described in Tablet VI of the Epic of Gilgamesh in which the two face the Bull of Heaven, a mythological creature sent by Inanna against them. The lion is also a sacred animal to the goddess Inanna/Ištar, see Ibid., 187.

> The principal religious artifacts excavated in early Neolithic Baluchistan consist of clay figurines of human females and bulls. They are likely to have the same function and meaning as their western Asian counterparts, worshipped for the sake of fertility, representing 'Mother Earth' and her husband 'Father Sky' imagined to have the shape of a heavenly bull that roars in thunder and fertilises the earth with its rain-semen.[42]

The institution of sacrifice is one of those Vedic cultural elements that reject ascetic traditions. Certainly, even at the time of the Buddha, at least reminiscences of human sacrifice (*puruṣamedha*) were known, which, before it was completely replaced by animal sacrifice, was certainly a reality of the Vedic world, of which the Buddha makes no secret of his radical rejection.[43] In human sacrifice, the designated 'victim' was "first roamed around for one year with a victorious army, symbolically conquering the whole world for the sacrificing king […]. The culmination of the sacrifice included the victim's 'sacred marriage' with the sacrificing king's chief queen".[44] The theme of world conquest is ubiquitous in Vedic culture, and we find it in various forms that symbolically testify to a process of anthropization of the land that, from a previous state of wild indeterminacy, is precisely 'conquered', domesticated and organized for human interest. In this form of conquest space is 'organized', and the energy of the fertility of the land, from untamed, is mastered through division, organization into specific sectors, such as may be a field for cultivation or the boundaries of a city.[45] This is the case, for example, with the Rājasūya ceremony: an ancient Vedic ritual dedicated to royal investiture. In this case the *yajamāna* is the destined ruler, and the sacrifice is understood as the conquest of the world itself (*diśo vai svargo lokaḥ*). Such ceremony recalls the primal process of the anthropization of an archaic place, an idealized and primitive chaos symbolized by the forest (*araṇya*). The rite recalls the assertion of order by the warrior power (*kṣatriya*), which organizes the world into quarters of space (*diśām aveṣṭayaḥ*) and then conquers it (*digvyāsthāpanam*). The *rājasūya* is an ancient consecration ritual that symbolically stages a conquest of various worlds, the apex of which is the divine dimension of *svargaloka*. It is necessary to construct three ritual platforms placed on a sacrificial pole. Each platform represents a world to be conquered: earth, atmosphere, and sky. The *yajamāna* must undertake a symbolic journey over the worlds using

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[42] Ibid., 188.

[43] Johannes Bronkhorst, "Buddhism and sacrifice," 7-17; Gananath Obeyesekere, "The Myth of the Human Sacrifice: History, Story and Debate in a Buddhist Chronicle," *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 25 (1989).

[44] Asko Parpola, *Iconographic Evidence of Mesopotamian Influence on Harappan Ideology and Its Survival in the Royal Rites of the Veda and Hinduism*, 189.

[45] Numerous considerations could be made about the very concept of field (*kṣetra*), a term that in Indian philosophies, especially in Sāṃkhya and Buddhism, is used to denote a certain area of knowledge investigated by a knower (*kṣetrajñā*). But the term *kṣetra* can also specifically denote the concept of habitat, distinguishing the debate in which the ascetic fits. Indeed, the yogin "is framed in the ascetic's more general *fuga mundi*, his rejection of the human habitat (*kṣetra*) and his desire to reintegrate with nature, assimilating himself into the domain of the forest (*vana*)", cfr. Antonio Rigopoulos, "Asceti e Termitai. A Proposito Di Buddhacarita 7, 15," *Consonanze* 11 (2017): 195-215.

a ladder that rests on the pole to reach a wooden wheel at the top of the pole.[46] In this way the village (*grāma*) is founded, which arises in oppositional dialectics with the forest: on the one hand the archaic-unordered place, on the other the conquest of chaos by the warrior-pioneer who imposes order through the organization of space. We can see in this rite therefore a reminder of how anthropization takes place through the subjugation (*yoke*) of the forces of nature to human will: just as the harnessing of the bull also harnesses the power of the animal to make it plowed in the organized space of the fields, the ruler uses the power of the tamed lion to maintain the newly established order.[47]

In the case of the *puruṣamedha*, on the other hand, the chief queen is also identified with Mother Earth and the goddess *Vāc* who, in addition to representing language as the first ordering and normative force of society that through the designation of names gives an identity to things made usable by human power, is also called both 'Lioness' (*siṃhī*) and 'Water buffalo cow' (*mahiṣī*), subsuming within herself the two animals that symbolize precisely the process of anthropization.[48]

A Bull among men: the Buddha as Master of Yoga

From the earliest evidence, Buddhism has fluctuated in the spatiality of the forest and the village, which are also central elements in defining the different types of practices and possible Buddha-figures.[49] However, while more traditional asceticism advocated an extreme form of exile and thus escape into the forest, Buddhism has stabilized over time in a middle form: neither entirely in one dimension nor the other.[50] Buddhism is a border discipline, halfway between the village and the forest, just as its ascetic practices are more moderate,

[46] Martin G. Wiltshire, *Ascetic Figures Before and in Early Buddhism: the Emergence of Gautama as the Buddha*, (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1990), 229-230.

[47] Interestingly, in regard to what we have previously said about the term yoga as denoting harnessing, the use of *yójana* as a unit of measurement for distances, but also to denote the act of harnessing, is noteworthy. Is this perhaps a reminiscence of how the division of plowed fields through the subjugation of the fertile force of the bull is also at the origin of the organization of spaces? See for example Ṛgveda 6.62.6; 7.67.8; 8.72.6. It is likely that some royal Vedic (*vrātya*) rites "have essentially come from the first wave of Indo-Aryan speakers" (Asko Parpola, *Iconographic Evidence of Mesopotamian Influence on Harappan Ideology and Its Survival in the Royal Rites of the Veda and Hinduism*, 184) which started possibly in 2000 BC, while the Ṛgvedic hymns are considered by Parpola to be an elaboration of the second wave of Indo-Aryan peoples, taking place from 1200 BC. Many Vedic symbols related to royal ritual would thus be indebted to Harappan culture, but in turn, Harappan customs seem to be strongly leagued to Mesopotamian ones (p. 185): "The Harappan 'priest-king's' robe and a fragmentary bull statuette also found at Mohenjo-daro are both decorated with trefoils which once contained red paste. In ancient West Asia, the trefoil was an astral symbol (resembling the pictogram for 'asterism') used to decorate figurines of the 'Bull of Heaven'. The Harappan robe has a counterpart in the *tārpya* garment which the Vedic king donned in his royal consecration (*rājasūya*); it is said to represent the garment of the divine king, god Varuṇa, who is associated among other things with the night sky". Regarding the ritual of Rājasūya, it is worth pointing out the ancient links that exist between the figure of the ruler and the figure of the herdsman in the Vedic world (Nelson 2020, see bibliography), further confirming the connection between urbanization and the figure of the bull that we are analyzing here. In this regard, see also Kulke 1992 and Tull 1966 in bibliography.

[48] Asko Parpola, *Iconographic Evidence of Mesopotamian Influence on Harappan Ideology and Its Survival in the Royal Rites of the Veda and Hinduism*, 189.

[49] Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, 185.

[50] Martin G. Wiltshire, *Ascetic Figures Before and in Early Buddhism: the Emergence of Gautama as the Buddha*, 229-230; Johannes Bronkhorst, "Buddhism and Sacrifice," 7-17.

renouncing the extreme form of symbolic protest against the social order and functionally choosing what is most appropriate to do, as it appears evident also in Snp 2.13. If in fact Buddhist asceticism is confirmed to be a radical renunciation of the world (*sammā so loke paribbajeyya*), it must also be said that Buddhism rejects all extremes (which does not mean all rigor), including therefore the practice of mortification that characterizes other forms of asceticism. The world (*loka*) that Buddhism opposes, is the same world that the Vedas describe as partitioned space (organized in the main directions) that the warrior conquers by removing it from the chaotic domain of wilderness.

> The world is, of course, *saṃsāra*, and given the emphasis early Buddhist doctrine places on the individual's creation of *saṃsāra* through the mind, the teachings which will follow have a dual ambience; they define the mind's grasping what it perceives in the world and the monk's relations with the world after he has learnt to detach himself from false perceptions. That is, the monk is still in the world, though not of it: paradoxically, it is this quality which gives him his facility for mediation.[51]

Therefore, Buddhism cannot be understood without referring to the key-issue of urbanization and the relationship there is between society, constituted normative power (lion) and the force of nature (bull) bent to human needs in an organized form. The cultivated field is the first distinguishable form of anthropization.

In contrast to the spontaneous growth of plants in the forest, agriculture imposes a systematic arrangement upon the cultivated land, known as a field, where plants adhere to organized lines. A plowed field is distinguishable by its strictly regulated layout, meticulously designed by human intervention. The bull, serving as the instrumental force enabling this anthropogenic transformation, bears profound symbolic significance.

Drawing upon the aforementioned rationale, the bull establishes a profound association with the practice of *yoga* through a distinct array of symbolic references. It is plausible to propose that, within society, the bull's strength is harnessed for the purpose of productivity, namely in the form of cultivated fields. However, within ascetic practice, this vital life force is perceived as inherent in all living beings, and it is the ascetic who possesses the ability to subjugate it to their own volition, akin to the societal subjugation (referred to as *yoking* or *yoga*) of the bull for the sake of its utility. As mentioned above, the Buddha is often called by the epithet *narāsabha* (bull among men), and the figure of the bull appears to be of similar importance to that of the lion, to the extent that it could be said that the Buddha is presented as the figure who sums up in himself the positive qualities of the bull and the lion. In AN 4.8 and 10.22 the bull and the lion appear together: the Buddha claims the bull's place and roars like a lion in the assemblies (*āsabhaṃ ṭhānaṁ paṭijānāti, parisāsu sīhanādaṃ*

[51] Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, 192.

nadati). The bull is also employed as a metaphor in SN 35.246. For it is said that if a barley-loving bull breaks into a barley field, he can enjoy it as much as he wants, but if he is caught in the act by the humans who chase him away, he will forever remember this event. This sutta is very important because not only does it use the metaphor of the field as the figure of the bull, but also because it brings back the classic dichotomy between village and forest. Here, then, is the problem of cognitive habituation as a classical theme in Buddhism, which can also testify to very ancient symbologies, perhaps at the very origin of Buddhist thought.

> After beating him, he would drive out the bull. This could happen a second and a third time. So that barley-loving bull, whether he went to the village or the forest, whether he used to stand or sit, remembering the previous beating he received from the stick, would never enter that barley field again.[52]

Nevertheless, the bull is not just a positive symbol. As it is connected to worldliness and fertility, if not properly managed (by wisdom) here it is left to itself, and so "the man of little knowledge grows old like a bull, who grows only in bulk, without his wisdom growing at all".[53] Studies on the figure of the bull in Buddhism have particularly been made in relation to the fertility component. As a symbol of the fertile force that is subjugated in agriculture or disciplined in ascetic practice, the bull is also connected with sexuality, which in Buddhism possesses, as we know, a somewhat controversial role, which I will not be able to address here for reasons of space, but which has been extensively covered by Powers.[54]

Founding Kingship: lion's strength

In this section we will devote ourselves to the analysis of the role of the lion in ancient Buddhism, referring in particular to the socio-historical aspects that characterized the cultural milieu in which ancient Buddhism flourished. The remarks on the foundation of the city and the social order should not be forgotten: Buddhism develops in a context of strong urbanization, in which the already consolidated social order spreads, plunging the Vedic model of society into crisis and allowing ascetic movements that opposed this model to spread successfully.

[52] Original: *nāsāyaṃ suggahitaṃ gahetvā uparighaṭāyaṃ suniggahitaṃ niggaṇheyya. uparighaṭāyaṃ suniggahitaṃ niggahetvā daṇḍena sutāḷitaṃ tāḷeyya. daṇḍena sutāḷitaṃ tāḷetvā osajjeyya. evañhi so, bhikkhave, goṇo kiṭṭhādo gāmagato vā araññagato vā, ṭhānabahulo vā assa nisajjabahulo vā na taṃ kiṭṭhaṃ puna otareyya— tameva purimaṃ daṇḍasamphassaṃ samanussaranto*. My translation.

[53] Dhp 152.

[54] John A. Powers, *Bull of a Man: Images of Masculinity, Sex, and the Body in Indian Buddhism*, (UK: Harvard University Press, 2009).

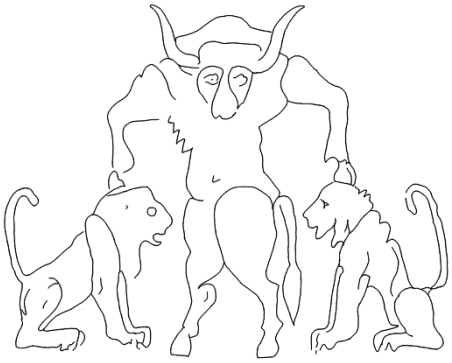

Fig. 4 – A Bull taming two lions, part of a seal impression from Susa.

Fig. 5 – Hindus Valley seal M 308 depicting a man holding two tigers or lions.

Mentions of the figure of the lion in this sense we find, for example, in DN 25 where a teaching of the Buddha is compared to the roaring of a lion (*udumbarikāya paribbājakārāme sīhanādaṃ naditvā vehāsaṃ*…), interestingly, the following sutta (DN 26) is entitled precisely to the Wheel-Turning Monarch (*cakkavattisutta*); the text clearly intends to reflect on the figure of the monarch as opposed to that of the Buddha. It seems clear that this comparison is intended and not accidental, like in AN 10.21, where the comparison between the two figures is explicitly stated. Here the lion is addressed as the subject of the speech. The lion is the "king of beasts" (*sīho… migarājā*). When, toward evening, the lion comes out of his den, it is said to look around,[55] then he roars three times before setting out on the hunt. But then the truth is revealed: the Buddha is like a lion, and the lion is an epitome, a definition (*adhivacana*), of him: "*lion* is a term to address the Thus-gone, the perfected one, the fully awakened Buddha; when the Thus-gone teaches *dharma* to an assembly, this is [like] his lion's roar" (*sīho ti kho, bhikkhave, tathāgatassetaṃ adhivacanaṃ arahato sammāsambuddhassa; yaṃ kho, bhikkhave, tathāgato parisāya dhammaṃ deseti, idamassa hoti sīhanādasmiṃ*).

The figure of the bull also appears in this sutta, which is confirmed to be part of an interesting pairing with the lion. The two animals are clearly of a metaphor inherent in kingship and law, represented by the turning of the wheel, as in the ancient Vedic ritual of *rājasūya*. The figure of the bull is important to such an extent that the very role of the Buddha is seen as taking

[55] The expression "four quarters" (*catuddisaṃ anuviloketi*), found also in other Suttas of the Lion (*sīhasutta*) like AN 4.33 or 5.99, is a clear reference to the quarters of space (*diśām aveṣṭayaḥ*) which divide the world (*loka*) according to the Early Vedic cosmology. This division is part of a conception of the about the organization of the world as an entity administered by human power from the space removed from the chaos of the forest (*araṇya*), ideally opposed to the village as an un-organized and pre-social place. Therefore, in the Vedic ruler's initiation rite, he poses himself as the conqueror (*digvyāsthāpanam*) of the world and that with the use of the vajra weapon, "he wins the 'quarters of the universe' and descends again" (Martin G. Wiltshire, *Ascetic Figures Before and in Early Buddhism: the Emergence of Gautama as the Buddha*, 230). The combination of village and forest dates back to Vedic reflections. The forest was seen as otherness, the place where human domination was absent, but over time it also became the place of exile of the ascetics who sought an escape from the village (Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, 146).

his place in the place of the bull: "ten powers, o mendicants, the Thus-gone possesses. With these forces, he acknowledges the place of the bull and roars his lion's roar in the assemblies, thus setting the Brahma's wheel" (*dasayimāni, bhikkhave, tathāgatassa tathāgatabalāni, yehi balehi samannāgato tathāgato āsabhaṃ ṭhānaṃ paṭijānāti, parisāsu sīhanādaṃ nadati, brahmacakkaṃ pavatteti*).[56]

The metaphor of the lion is also found in AN 4.33, where the beast is again mentioned as king of all beasts. The other animals, hearing his roar, immediately seek shelter from the mighty lion (cf. also SN 21.6). So majestic and powerful is the teaching of the Buddha as well, for he fears nothing in the world, having set the wheel of Dharma in motion. Here the roar of the lion seems to have a kind of revelatory power. Just as animals become frightened when they hear it, so people, recognizing the fact that we are all impermanent, become fearful. A very similar speech is found in SN 22.78, but here the roar of the Buddha-lion is nothing other than the cessation of identity: this reveals the truth about "the cessation and origin of identity... leading to the relief of suffering" (*sakkāyañca nirodhañca, sakkāyassa ca sambhavaṃ*).

In SN 4.12, Death (*Māra*) himself comes before the Buddha to confront him, "why do you roar like a lion?" (*sinnu sīhova nadasi...*), Māra asks, for he is confident that he can take on the Buddha. However, when the Buddha reveals that this lion roar is the same of the great heroes (*mahāvīrā*), the awakened ones who have transcended attachment to the world (*tiṇṇā loke visattikaṃ*), Death immediately disappears. In SN 1.38 the noble and proud posture of the lion is compared to meditative practice, and again the Buddha is presented as a lion: "he expanded his outer robe folded in four and laid down in the lion's posture, placing one foot on top of the other from the right side, mindful and aware. […] 'The ascetic Gotama is surely a lion, sir! And as a lion, he sustains painful physical feelings remaining unperturbed'" (*catugguṇaṃ saṅghāṭiṃ paññāpetvā dakkhiṇena passena sīhaseyyaṃ kappeti pāde pādaṃ accādhāya sato sampajāno ... sīho vata, bho, samaṇo gotamo; sīhavatā ca samuppannā sārīrikā vedanā dukkhā tibbā kharā kaṭukā asātā amanāpā sato sampajāno adhivāseti avihaññamāno ti*). The yogic posture is compared to that of the lion also in other occasions, like in AN 4.246 or SN 4.13 (*sīhaseyyā*, "a lion lying down").

[56] The phrase *āsabhaṃ ṭhānaṃ paṭijānāti*, when translated verbatim, reads as "acknowledges the place of the bull," but it can also be interpreted as "claiming the bull's place". The Buddha's ten powers encompass the following dimensions: discernment of the possible and the impossible (*ṭhānañca ṭhānato aṭṭhānañca aṭṭhānato yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti*) with unclouded clarity; comprehension of the consequences of actions undertaken at any given time; apprehension of where the path of practice ultimately culminates; acute perception of the world's (*loka*) appearance in each of its constituents; insight into the beliefs of sentient beings; recognition of the faculties of other sentient beings; understanding of corruption, purification, liberations, immersions, and attainments; deciphering the implications of the multifarious past lives in oneself; grasping how sentient beings undergo reincarnation based on their deeds; and lastly, attainment of the immaculate freedom of the heart and wisdom that paves the way for the cessation of defilements.

Also, in Snp 5.1 Buddha's teaching is compared to the roar of a lion (…*sīhova nadatī vane*), but in addition to the lion metaphor, there is an association with the solar figure: "Ajita saw the Buddha like a hundred rays of sun shining" (*ajito addasa buddhaṃ, sataraṃsiṃva bhāṇumaṃ*). The lion holds great significance due to its association with royalty, rendering it a vital symbol. Various connections can be established between the lion's imagery and the role of a ruler. However, it is essential to emphasize that Buddhism employs an inversion of this symbolism, granting it a dual significance. While Buddhism criticizes social hierarchies and the figure of leaders, it still draws a comparison between the Buddha and a ruler. This does not contradict the anthropological concept of Buddhism, as the awakened ruler, referred to as a buddha-*cakkavattin*, does not embody despotism or injustice but rather serves as the guarantor of the equality espoused by Buddhists. Herein lies the interplay of inversions: in traditional cultures, the ruler appropriates the lion's strength to consolidate their power, transforming it into the monarch's authority, ensuring social order. In contrast, the Buddha represents a 'true' lion, utilizing the lion's strength to symbolize justice and the power of the *dhamma*—a term that has evolved from denoting the ruler's law to signifying the inherent truth found within Buddhist teachings.

In many suttas the theme of the city is a ubiquitous backdrop where the events occur. In Snp 5.1 the brahmin Bāvari from the city of the Kosalans is tricked into performing worldly rituals that lead him only to suffering and malaise. Then a goddess runs to his aid, revealing to him that knowledge about the head and its splitting (*muddhani muddhapāte vā*) is not in the possession of the charlatan who instructed him (*ñāṇaṃ tassa na vijjati*).

> Madam, you surely know,
> please answer my question.
> Let me hear what you have to say
> about heads and head-splitting.
>
> [*The goddess answers*]
> Even I don't know this,
> I have no knowledge about it,
> For when it comes to heads or head-splitting,
> The Victorious is the one who has vision. […]
> From the city of Kapilavastu,
> the Leader of the World has departed.
> He is a scion of King Okkāla,
> a Sakyan, and a light-bringer.
> For he, o brahmin, is the Awakened One!
> He has gone beyond everything,

He has reached the whole-gnosis and power,
He is seer into the whole thing,
He has attained the end of every deeds,
He is unfettered with the ending of attachments.
The Buddha, the blessed one in the world, the Seer.
He teaches the Dharma. Go to him and ask, he will answer you.[57]

In order, therefore, to conclude our consideration of the figure of the bull and the lion, we can say that certainly also in India the lion represented, as in Mesopotamia, a central figure to symbolize the legislative power of the ruler: "the symbolism of kingship came to embrace the subjection of the forces of the wilderness […] kings both subdued them and maintained them as a source of power".[58] In Buddhism, however, this role is strongly criticized, and with the contestation of social classes, the figure of the lion is also inverted to be, from a symbol of royal strength to a symbol of knowledge, which in Buddhism is interpreted precisely as the means of freeing oneself from cognitive habituations that, repeated within the confines of society, lead to suffering. The lion is the best animal, and in the same way the *paññindriya*, like the quality of the lion, is the best power one can get because it leads to the awakening (*aggamakkhāyati, yadidaṃ bodhāya*). The same inversion took place also in other important 'traditional' concepts of old Indian religion, like *karma*: "Buddhist doctrine of *karma* consistently inverts the brāhmaṇical notion of action, turning it, paradoxically, into the morality of the actor's state of mind".[59]

Conclusion

This article examined the incorporation of the bull and lion figures within an ancient lineage, conceivably originating from the Mesopotamian realm, and their symbolic significance as fundamental constituents of societal establishment: the lion representing kingship and the bull embodying fertility. These archetypal representations form the bedrock of urban foundations, a concept that Buddhism challenges due to its opposition to normative and hierarchical structures, favoring egalitarian ideals.[60]

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[57] Original: *bhotī carahi jānāsi, taṃ me akkhāhi pucchitā; muddhaṃ muddhādhipātañca, taṃ suṇoma vaco tava. ahampetaṃ na jānāmi, ñāṇamettha na vijjati; muddhani muddhādhipāte ca, jinānaṃ hettha dassanaṃ. […] purā kapilavatthumhā, nikkhanto lokanāyako; apacco okkākarājassa, sakyaputto pabhaṅkaro. so hi brāhmaṇa sambuddho, sabbadhammāna pāragū; sabbābhiññābalappatto, sabbadhammesu cakkhumā; sabbakammakkhayaṃ patto, vimutto upadhikkhaye. buddho so bhagavā loke, dhammaṃ deseti cakkhumā; taṃ tvaṃ gantvāna pucchassu, so te taṃ byākarissati.* My translation.

[58] Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, 147.

[59] Ibid., 122.

[60] This study has obviously presented only a selection of texts to focus on some aspects and historical periods, but it must be said that animal symbols in Buddhism go on for a long time, and have been studied on several occasions, even in the case of the bull and the lion, presenting aspects that go beyond their hypothesized historical births and connect them more solidly to doctrinal and religious aspects of Buddhism. See for example Gokhale, B. G. "Animal Symbolism in Early Buddhist Literature and Art," *East and West* 24.1/2 (1974).

Such analysis could perhaps recall what Drekmeir called "tribal trauma",[61] which would link these considerations to the theory of urbanization. It was also hypothesized that the *dukkha* mentioned in the Buddha was due to an existential malaise that was exacerbated by the problems of heavy urbanization. Large cities brought epidemics, economic problems, and disconnection from nature. Gombrich also speculated of "a link between urbanism and spiritual malaise".[62] For this reason, "Buddhism might be seen as a reaction against the whole movement of civilization from its pastoral origins in the hills, where men were surrounded by nature and governed by its rhythms, to the artificiality of the man-made landscape and the urban anonymity of the relatively densely populated agricultural plains".[63]

Beyond this, the figures of the bull and the lion are taken from Buddhism to be transformed in a dialectical game of inversions, in which their ancient role is partly converted. The Buddha encapsulates both figures, but he is not a monarch of the city but a ruler of the mind, and similarly the bull is no longer the holder of the fertile force of soil and sexuality, but is channeled into discipline, revealing an ancient symbolic connection with yogic practice. Such figures thus speak to us of a very ancient path, testifying to the controversial role of the city and anthropization in the development and spread of Buddhism, as well as the relationship between authority and dissident ascetic movements that opposed the Vedic order and rooted the discipline of instincts to shape yogic-meditative practice. Finally, while choosing to abdicate the radical asceticism that envisioned total retreat to the forest as an escape from the city, Buddhism retains the original meaning of *araññña* as an archetypal wilderness that maintains freedom (*mokkha*) from the normative order of the city (*gāma*) and its cognitive habituations that lead to discomfort (*dukkha*).[64]

[61] Greg Bailey and Ian Mabbett, *The Sociology of Early Buddhism*, 20.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Ibid., 23.
[64] MN 43 and MN 121 for the best examples of the *gāma*/*araññña* dichotomy in Buddhism.

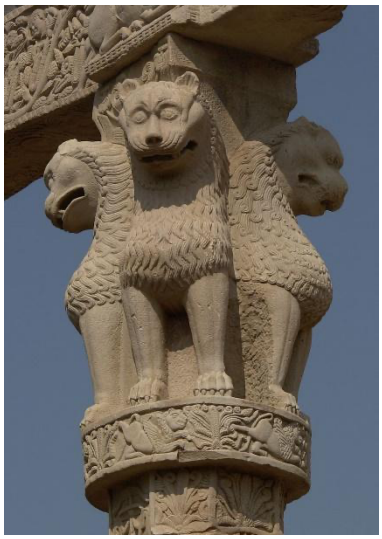

Fig. 6 The lions imperial banner of the ruler Aśoka Maurya considered the first Buddhist ruler of India (268-232 BC). Capitals with these lions dominate the pillars erected by the sovereign after his conversion and are considered a work in favor of the Buddhist doctrine he defended.

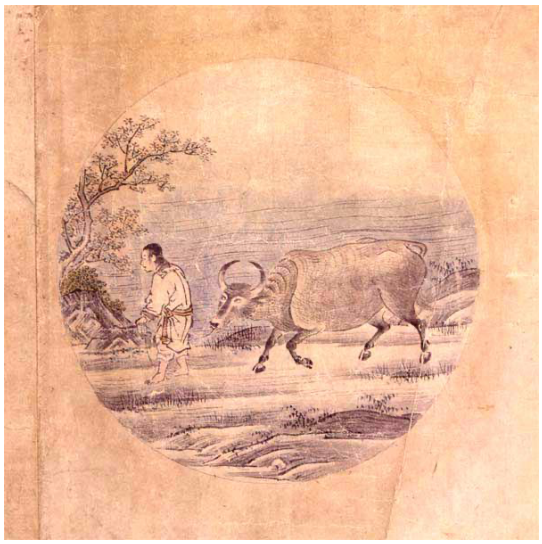

Fig. 7 "Taming the bull". Fifth of the 10 illustrations created by Tenshō Shūbun (天 章 周文) to represent the story of the ten bulls (十牛 図) of Zen Buddhism. In this story inspired by MN 33 the bull is used as a metaphor for the body and the self, and it is first perceived, then captured and tamed to finally transcend.

Fig. 8 Araldic lions from the Sāṃcī stupa

Fig. 9 Taurus riding, from the Sāṃcī stupa

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Abbreviations

Pāli sources have primarily been cited from the printed PTS editions, but reference has also been made to the online archive of SuttaCentral (Sujato et al. 2005–).[65]

DN : Dīghanikāya
MN : Majjhimanikāya
SN : Saṃyuttanikāya
AN : Aṅguttaranikāya
KN : Khuddakanikāya

[65] Sujato, Bhante, Bucknell, Rod, Kelly, John, et al. (eds.), "SuttaCentral: Early Buddhist Texts, Translations, and Parallels," SuttaCentral Development Trust (2005–), http://suttacentral.net, (on 14 Aug. 2023).

Dhp : Dhammapada
Snp : Suttanipāta
Ud : Udāna

Illustrations

All illustrations are by the author. No images have been reworked from other publications, although it is indicated where original photos of the seals and artifacts mentioned can be found. The illustrations are faithful reproductions of the original works. In any case, I would like to point out the sources from which they were initially drawn.

***Fig.* 1**: Amarāvati Mahā stupa, Museum of Chennai, India. Photo by Soham Banerjee CC BY 2.0.

***Fig.* 2**: Horned deity, anthropomorphized bull sitting cross-legged. Drawing traced starting from the view of the original. A photo of the artifact in question can be found in various publications, see for example Desset et al. 2022: 61. This artifact is stored at *Miho Museum*, Japan. Origin: South or eastern Iran, Late 3000 BCE-Early 2000 BCE (有角神霊坐像 - 南または東イランか紀元前 3 千 年紀後期ー紀元前 2 千年紀初期 エレクトラム H-15). Catalogue entry: https://www.miho.jp/booth/html/artcon/00002317.htm and https://www.miho.jp/booth/img-big/00001893.jpg.

***Fig.* 3**: Seal M-304A from Mohenjo-daro. The image is free-copyright. Here a photo of the original:

***Fig.* 4**: Drawing traced starting from the view of the original. Other illustrations of the artifact in question can be found in various publications, see for example Parpola 2015: 238 and Idem 2018: 437, Desset et al. 2022: 66.

***Fig.* 5**: Drawing traced starting from the view of the original. A photo of the artifact in question can be found in various publications, see for example Parpola 2015: 227.

Fig. 6: This photo is instead taken from Sāṃcī stūpa, © Yann Forget / Wikimedia Commons / CC-BY-SA.

Fig. 7: Public domain image / Free Copyright.

Fig. 8: Sāṃcī stupa, N-MP-220 photo by Vu2sga CC BY-SA 3.0

Fig. 9: Stupa 3 front architraves top panel left post. Photo by Bernard Gagnon CC BY-SA 3.

Other seals mentioned in note 18:

Fig. 10: Seal #222

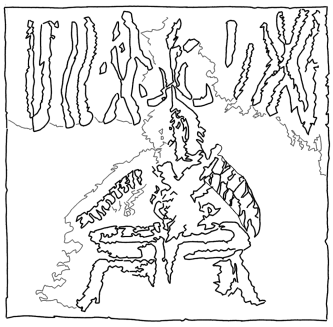

Fig. 11: Seal #235

Fig. 12: Hindus copper plate #1