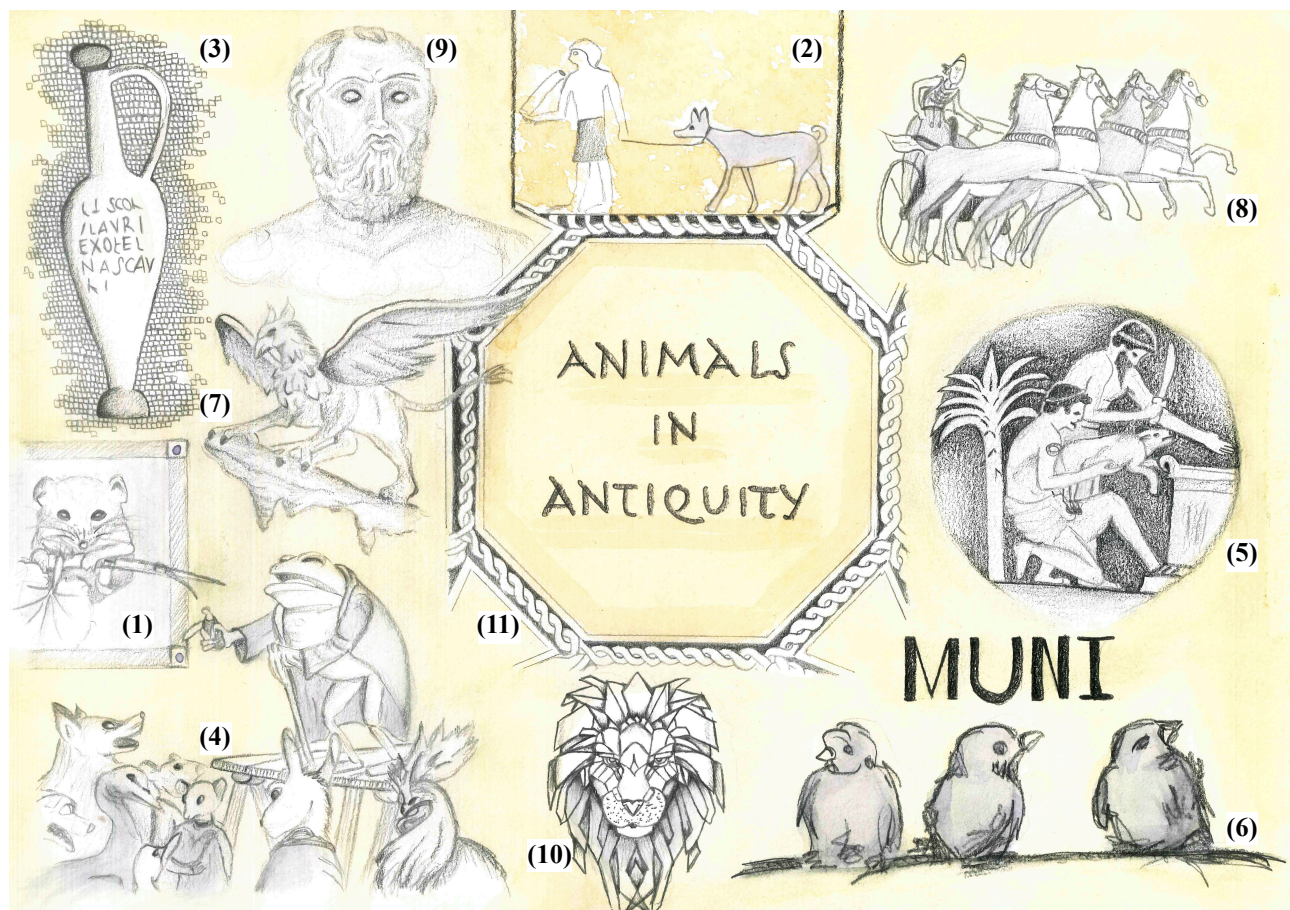


## Animals in Antiquity: from Everyday Life to Magic

The present work was written as part of the seminar „Animals in Antiquity: from Everyday Life to Magic“ and should be seen as a consolidation of the presented drawing, which should function as a visual overview of the topics discussed in the lectures.



(1) Ordinary field mouse. (2) Ancient drawing on the wall of a tomb at Beni Hassan in Egypt showing a hunter holding the leashes of a dog. (3) One of four mosaics of the villa of the famous garum producer (fish sauce producer) Aulus Umbricius Scaurus. The amphora shown here represented the best of the four varieties, the mackerel dip. (4) Cover of „Aesop's Fables“ from Vernon Jones, Dover Publications (2009). Illustrated by Arthur Rackham. (5) Sacrifice of a pig in ancient Greece (tondo on Attic red-figure bowl, 510–500 BCE, collections of the Louvre: G112). (6) Birds sitting on a branch of a tree. (7) Interpretation of a mythological griffin. (8) A typical motif of chariot racing in ancient Greece. (9) Illustration of a bust of Plato. (10) Interpretation of a Lions head, as an ancient symbol of strength and glory. (11) Ornaments alienated from the Roman Mosaic from Lod' (Israel) featuring a Roman-era mosaic.

In the mentioned lecture, the topic of ancient fauna served as a framework and therefore the frame of the Roman Mosaic from Lod' (11) was used here as a central characteristic. The middle panel originally shows a twelve-sided polygon inscribed in a square with an octagon in the center, which is surrounded by rectangular and triangular medallions. The medallions framed with braided ribbons contain representations of fish, birds and wild animals with their prey. In the central field, a lion and a lioness sit opposite to each other on two mountain peaks. A group of exotic animals have settled in front of this landscape. A giraffe, an elephant, a rhinoceros, a tiger and a water buffalo are presented peacefully here. Colourful natural stones and glass tesserae in the colours black, red, brown, white, yellow, ocher, grey and blue tones were used (Neumann 2013, 4).

Reflecting the diversity of the animal world, well-known and rather unknown, as well as exotic animals were addressed. Among other animals, the house mouse (1), which most likely spread to Europe from the East or northeast of Asia during the Bronze Age, is even used in ancient art and literature. Babylonian scholars already told the story of „the town mouse and the country mouse“. Later, Horace extends one of Aesop's fables and examines the relative merits of rural and urban life. Here mice are used as a harmless and attractive means of making a statement, with the traditional, rough values of the landscape triumphing over urban sophistication. Another example is the *Batrachomyomachia* or „the battle of frogs and mice“, which can be seen as a parody of the *Iliad*. This epic, apparently painted on the walls of taverns, picks up on a surprisingly common topic in literature, but contrary to its harmless characteristics: mouse warriors (Lewis 2018, 168). Another rather unknown animal, an Egyptian mongoose (2) is depicted on the wall of a tomb at the Beni Hassan tomb. These are just two examples of the influence of wildlife in ancient art and literature.

Another relevant topic concerning animals in antiquity is that of economics and gastronomy. From the fields of agriculture to trade practices, the ancient preparation of animal products was also mentioned. For example, *garum* (3), a fermented fish sauce, was a well-known food in Roman antiquity and was handed down through old recipes. This is also the case with a typical mosaic from the atrium of the villa of the famous Garum producer *Aulus Umbricius Scaurus* in Pompeii, that bears witness to a typical storage vessel for the storage and transport of the noble sauce *garum* (Curtis 1984, 561; Guzzo 2007, 200).

As already mentioned several times, not only the antique art, but also the old scriptures testify to the importance of animals. The fables of Aesop and stories of Aristophanes serve as a suitable medium. The Cover of „Aesop's Fables“ from Vernon Jones, Dover Publications (2009), stands here for the several comedies written by or after the great philosophers (4). They are, being from the late to mid-

6th century BCE, the world's most famous collection of moral stories. These early stories are essentially allegorical myths that were originally passed on from person to person and often depict animals or insects, e.g. foxes, grasshoppers, frogs, cats, dogs, ants, crabs, deer and monkeys (Horgan 2014).

But the most well-known reference to animals in antiquity was probably related to their religious importance. So sacrifice-related imagery was also widespread in religious, roman art. However, it should be noted here that the depiction of the actual killing of an animal was incredibly rare (Elsner 2012, 121). One example (5) would be the Attic red-figure bowl (510–500 BCE). Depictions of sacrifice, such as we have before us here, are not uncommon in vase painting of this and the following epoch. What is special about our shell interior is the naive, genuinely “epic” rendering of the process. In contrast to the more recent depictions of sacrificial scenes on Greek vases, which emphasise the sacred, solemnity of the process, the image of the *Epidromos* bowl appears to be a scene of ordinary life (Hartwig 1893, 48-49). Likewise, in the illustrated calendars, while animal sacrifice appears in the second to third centuries of scenes depicting pagan festivals in November and January, it is replaced by images of incense burning or libation by the fourth century (Elsner 2012, 133).

That animals were credited with such a significance in religion is probably also due to theories of divination. Put simply, the souls of animals establish a connection with the divine (Struck 2014, 318). With the Idea from Plato's *Timaeus* that the Cosmos is itself a living animal (*zōon*<sup>1</sup>), he explains this connection. Thus, the lowest of three souls, driven by impulses, should be able to perceive the environment instinctively (Struck 2014, 319-20). This is illustrated by the example of birds (6). Birds are already mentioned by the Babylonians, Assyrians and Hittites as divine signs. An inscription from the early fifth century from Ephesus describes the rules of bird divination (Struck 2014, 312). But also in Greek philosophical antiquity the behaviour of birds was exploited by, for example, analysing their flight behaviour, which belongs to the unnatural and natural group of divination and compares acute patterns of behaviour with past ones in order to recognise and interpret divination (Struck 2014, 311).

Connected to the divine are also the often mentioned mythological creatures. From centaurs, hydra, harpy, satyrs to nymphs and the Minotaur, various beings form the complex structure of the ancient mythological world. The griffin (7) is just one example of a mythological creature. It is a mostly winged hybrid, composed of a raven head and a lion's body, probably conceived in early Elam and

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<sup>1</sup> „Thus, then, in accordance with the likely account, we must declare that this Cosmos has verily come into existence as a Living Creature endowed with soul and reason owing to the providence of God“ (Plato – R. G. Bury, Plato IX: *Timaeus*. Harvard University Press (London 1989) 55).

reached Predynastic Egypt, where it developed independently. In the first quarter of the second millennium, the ancient Syrian griffin, which developed under Egyptian influence, spread to Anatolia and the Aegean. The griffin, which has been native to Crete since the Middle Minoan II / III period, was adapted to the Minoan style and is usually depicted as a hunter or the hunted one. As a later reference, in the Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Dante meets a chariot drawn by a griffin in a terrestrial paradise after the journey of Dante and Virgil through hell and purgatory (Calmeyer-Seidl 1998, 1218).

Moving on from the mythological aspect of animals, the topic of animals in ancient sports is here presented by the drawing of a four-horse chariot (8). Through the process of domestication, the function of equids changed from a main food source to „a living status symbol owned by the elite“ (Bell – Willekes 2014, 478) in the Greek world. They were used for processions, battles and athletic contests. While horse racing had been popular for thousands of years, the „earliest written description of a horse race in the Greek world comes from the *Iliad* (Homer, *Iliad* 23.566-611) and is the race for the *synōris* (the two-horse chariot)“ (Bell – Willekes 2014, 478). But it was not until 680 BCE, that a four-horse chariot race, the *tethrippon*, had been attested for an olympic event (Bell – Willekes 2014, 479; Humphrey 1986, 7).

However, the topics addressed so far throw a rather positive light on the idea of animals in antiquity, but this image is falsifying. The „domination and/or destruction of animals as an entertainment“ is not uncommon. Jo-Ann Shelton explains this concept by demonstrating that today's perception of animals differs severely from that of ancient Greece. Thus animals were not only killed for food or clothing, but as a matter of mere survival and had eventually both practical and symbolic purposes. „Spectacles that displayed a torment or killing of animals confirmed the superiority of humans over the natural world“ (Shelton 2014, 462). One example for this in ancient Greece would be the „cock-fighting“, which was even annually produced in Athens with state funds and was used to prepare soldiers for battle (Shelton 2014, 464). Another, that boar-fights, combined with a sacrifice of puppies, was carried out „to inspire martial valour and provide an object lesson for the young men, who would [...] be expected to fight ferociously and never to yield in battle“ (Shelton 2014, 465). The distinction between animals and humans here, is a key factor and was even discussed in Plato's *Timaeus*, in which he „portrays all forms of animal life [...] as having been derived from degraded, mentally deficient humans“ (Burgess 2008, 13).

This brings us to the general discussion of animals in ancient philosophy (9). Most Philosophers have seen a difference between animals and humans, but they did not regard human reason as an

essential distinguishing feature. Subsequently they shifted the discussion towards seeing the soul, reason and awareness as the defining difference, which changed their perception of the animals' moral status and led to a clearly anthropocentric approach to understanding the boundary between humans and animals (Steiner 2008, 27). However, Aristotle recognises that the possession of a rational soul does not distinguish humans from animals in a cosmic absolute sense, but only gradually (Steiner 2008, 34-35). The Stoics in turn dissolve this tension by elevating the line between humans and animals to a cosmic principle. By doing so, they remove any ambivalence regarding whether the animals have skills such as conceptual abstraction (Steiner 2008, 36). While the Stoics deny the animals 'ability to reason and opinion, they go one step further by denying the animals' ability to refrain from consenting to perceptual phenomena (Steiner 2008, 38).

This debate has been taken up and discussed repeatedly for millennia. However, the complex lines of thought and concepts cannot be dealt with in more detail in this work, in addition to some topics, such as the medical benefits of animals in antiquity, ancient recipes or ancient fossils. Due to this, this work is primarily intended to draw attention to interesting aspects regarding animals in antiquity and to give a small excerpt of the topics covered in the course „Animals in Antiquity“.

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