

Four Hooves and a Horn: How (Not) to Poison Alexander the Great*

Isidora Tolić

University of Belgrade — Faculty of Philosophy, Department of Classics,
18–20, Čika Ljubina st., Belgrade, 11000, Republic of Serbia; isidora.tolic@f.bg.ac.rs, info@f.bg.ac.rs

For citation: Tolić I. Four Hooves and a Horn: How (Not) to Poison Alexander the Great. *Philologia Classica* 2022, 17 (2), 269–276. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu20.2022.206>

Several ancient authors tell a puzzling story of treason to murder Alexander the Great by presenting him with poison or poisonous water carried in a curious vessel — a hoof of a horse, a mule, or an ass. Porphyry of Tyre, citing Kallimachos and Philo the Paradoxographer, gives us a reason to believe that the mention of hoof-made vessels was a misinterpretation of horn-made chalices, or put otherwise, drinking horns. Presuming that the vessel in question indeed was a drinking horn, we are left with an unusual image — Alexander the Great perished after drinking the poisonous water from the horn of a hornless animal. We can look into the development of this legend and propose its origins by examining mutual features of two distinct traditions — the Greek legend of the river Styx and its lethal streams and the Indo-Iranian tradition of several miraculous features of a unicorn's horn, attested in Iranian, Indian, and Greek sources. After the survey of relevant sources, we see that the horn from Philo's story represented a legendary present of Indian rulers intended to save Alexander the Great from harm. Various layers of misapprehension transformed the legendary gift into a device contracted to harm him. This way, the author demonstrates two points: 1) that the story told by Porphyry in *Styg.* 375F is a part of an Indo-Iranian tradition about unicorns and their miraculous features; and 2) that the legend of Alexander's poisoning represents a transformed and misinterpreted story of Alexander's grandest gift.

Keywords: the river Styx, unicorn, royal gift, Indo-Iranian traditions, Alexander the Great, paradoxography.

Among the sources for the death of Alexander the Great, it is possible to find a few versions of a peculiar episode related to the poisoning of the famous ruler. To assassinate Alexander, one of his generals¹ presented him with poison or poisonous water, transported in the hoof of an animal from the genus *Equus*. Several authors give similar accounts of this plot, with minor variations. According to Arrian (*Anab.* 7. 27. 1), Alexander was presented with an unknown concoction, simply called *φάρμακον*, that was transported in the hoof of a mule or a hinny (ἡμιόνου ὄπλη). Plutarch (*Alex.* 77) explains that the potion was, in fact, the water from a rock near Arcadian Nonacris (ὕδωρ εἶναι ... ἀπὸ πέτρας τινὸς ἐν Νωνάκριδι οὐσῆς), carried in the hoof of an ass (ὄνου χηλή). Other sources indi-

* The contents of this paper were presented during the *Spring Seminar in Indo-European Linguistics 2022*, organized by *DIEUS — Society of Indo-European Scholars in Serbia*. The realization of this research was financially supported by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Republic of Serbia (No. 451-03-68/2022-14/200163).

¹ According to Arrian, aided by Aristotle himself (Arr. *Anab.* 7. 27. 1).

cate that the water from this place could be nothing more than the Styx river (Hdt. 6. 74). According to Pausanias' version of this story (8. 18. 6), the assassin gave Alexander water from the Styx (τὸ ὕδωρ τῆς Στυγός) in the hoof of a horse (ὄπλῃ ἵππου).

Readers of this story may be perplexed by the two main elements of the plot against Alexander's life, namely the odd choice of poison and the unexpected vessel. These are, however, completely understandable if one has in mind the set of stories surrounding the waters of Styx and their fatal effects. Hesiod writes that gods pledged their oaths on the streams of Styx (Hes. *Theog.* 383–403), and Herodotus adds that men did the same (Hdt. 6. 74). Pausanias explains that Styx is poisonous for men and animals alike, adding that this liquid cuts through vessels of any material (Paus. 8. 18. 4–5). Within their accounts of Alexander's assassination, Plutarch and Pseudo-Callisthenes note that the hoof was chosen as the only type of vessel able to carry the waters of Styx, seeing that the river destroys every other material (Plut. *Alex.* 77; Ps. Callisth. 3. 31). There is, however, another testimony, unrelated to the murder of Alexander and preserved in a less studied source. In fragment 374 of his work *On the River Styx*, Porphyry of Tyre quotes Hdt. 6. 74. as an illustration of the river's extraordinary importance. Within the same fragment, Porphyry cites Kallimachos' work *On Nymphs*, where the author mentions that the river from Arcadian Nonacris cuts through vessels of every material, except for those which are κέρατινα. For now, the various stories of Styx and the optimal choice of container seem to coincide with the murderous plans of Alexander's generals.²

However, among further fragments of Porphyry's work *On the River Styx*, one unexpectedly finds an unusual anecdote from the life of Alexander the Great and his generals. The reader should not be confused by Porphyry's decision to include this episode in a work that, in all other respects, appears to be a Homeric interpretive essay; the streams of Styx and their fantastic features are an important component of both *On the River Styx* and the following anecdote:

Ἐπειδὴ περὶ τοῦ Στυγὸς ὕδατος ὁ λόγος ἐστί, δηλώσαι σοι βούλομαι καὶ ἑτέραν ἱστορίαν περὶ τοῦ αὐτοῦ. Φίλων γάρ ὁ Ἡρακλεώτης ἐν τῷ Πρὸς Νύμφιν περὶ θαυμασιῶν ἐν Σκύθαις φησὶν ὄνους γίνεσθαι κέρατα ἔχοντας, ταῦτα δὲ τὰ κέρατα δύνασθαι τοῦτο τὸ ὕδωρ διαφέρειν· καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τῷ Μακεδόνι ἐνεχθῆναι ὑπὸ Σωπάτρου κέρας τοιοῦτο, ὁ καὶ ἀνατεθῆναι ἐν Δελφοῖς, ἐφ' οὗ καὶ ἐπιγεγράφθαι· (Porph. *Styg.* 375F).³

“Since we are already discussing the waters of Styx, I would like to tell you another story about it. In his work *To Nymphis, on wonders*, Philo of Heraclea relates that among the Scythians, there are asses growing horns, and that these horns can carry the water of Styx. Such a horn, says Philo, was Sopater's gift to Alexander, who later dedicated it in Delphi, having inscribed the following words”⁴

This fragment represents an almost identical twin to a story preserved in Aelian's *On the Nature of Animals*. When viewed together, Aelian's and Porphyry's tales create a

² In their 2011 research, Adrienne Mayor and Antoinette Hayes give a comprehensive survey of available sources on Alexander's poisoning, particularly focusing on the stories featuring the river Styx. The authors go into great detail in their attempt to explain and examine a variety of factors contributing to the potential lethal traits of Styx (see esp. Mayor, Hayes 2011, 11–13).

³ The work is cited according to the Smith 1993 edition.

⁴ All translations mine.

more comprehensive image of the legend behind the story of Alexander's gift. The Aelian's version should be given in its entirety, as it describes the episode in more detail and sheds light on several obscure elements of Porphyry's quotation.

Ἐν τῇ Σκυθία γῆ γίνονται ὄνοι κερασφόροι, καὶ στέγει τὰ κέρατα ἐκεῖνα τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ Ἄρκαδικὸν τὸ καλούμενον τῆς Στυγός· τὰ δὲ ἄλλα ἀγγεῖα διακόπτει πάντα, κἄν ἢ σιδήρου πεποιημένα. τούτων τοι τῶν κεράτων ἔν ὑπὸ Σωπάτρου κομισθῆναι φασιν Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τῷ Μακεδόνι, καὶ ἐκείνον πυνθάνομαι θαυμάσαντα ἐς Δελφοὺς ἀνάθημα ἀναθεῖναι τῷ Πυθίῳ τὸ κέρας, καὶ ὑπογράψαι ταῦτα· (Ael. NA 10. 40).

"In the land of Scythia, there are horn-bearing asses, and these horns convey the Arcadian water, called the water of Styx. These streams cut through every other vessel, even those made of iron. They say that Sopater gave one of these horns to Alexander the Great. I hear that Alexander, amazed by such a gift, dedicated the horn to Pythian Apollo in Delphi, having added the following verses"⁵

After seeing the two versions, it is possible to notice their subtle differences and specify the central elements of the story. Porphyry of Tyre makes clear that his source for this episode is Philo of Heraclea, while Aelian does not mention any predecessors. Unlike Porphyry, he explains the unusual power of the horns, giving a brief account of their capability to carry an otherwise uncontainable liquid. This explanation provides the reader with the missing link between the horns and the water, which is implied but not further expounded upon by Porphyry's remarks. When he writes that the horns can τοῦτο τὸ ὕδωρ διαφέρειν, it is not entirely clear what kind of διαφέρειν the author had in mind. By virtue of connecting the two versions, one is presented with a complete picture — the Scythians own a unique breed of asses with wondrous horns. These horns were the only vessels capable of holding the streams of Styx. Alexander was gifted such a horn by Sopater, later dedicating it to Apollo in Delphi. This episode is preserved by Philo of Heraclea in his work on wonders, dedicated to Nymphis.

Having marked the narrative skeleton of this legend, one can begin discussing its individual elements. First of all, it is important to address the sources of the story of the horned asses and Alexander the Great. As previously mentioned, and according to his usual *modus operandi*, Porphyry names his source. This time, the source is Philo of Heraclea, also known as Philo the Paradoxographer (Runia 1994, 1), an author from the third century BC. Aelian does not mention Philo in NA 10. 40, but he does quote him in chapter 12. 34 of the same work as a source of a story of a rooster who loved the king Nicomedes' chalice bearer. On account of this, it is possible to conclude that Aelian knew and used the works of Philo the Paradoxographer. This also signifies that both versions of the story of the Scythian asses stem from Philo's work on miracles. The addressee of this work is Nymphis of Heraclea, a historian from the fourth century BC. He was the author of a voluminous work dedicated to Alexander, Diadochi, and Epigoni (Suda, s. ν. Νύμφις). Because of this, it is possible to suggest that the quoted part of Philo's work was thematically connected to Nymphis and his opus. One might even propose that the story of Alexander's

⁵ The inscriptions in Porphyry's and Aelian's versions are identical. The author has chosen not to quote them, seeing that they do not add any value to the understanding of the episode.

gift was more closely related to the work of Nymphis and that it was quoted, retold, or disputed by Philo. This is, however, impossible to prove.⁶

When it comes to the mention of the wondrous asses, it is important to address the following aspects of their description. First of all, the existence of horns is especially emphasized, seeing that growing horns is not a common trait of asses and similar animals. Apart from that, the two versions either collectively mention the asses and horns in the plural or a single horn when referring to a specific horn, which is Alexander's gift. This does not help the reader conclude how many horns each ass had, as several asses are bound to have several horns. Based exclusively on the use of grammatical numbers in the case of horns and asses, one might say that it is equally probable that each ass grew one horn as it is that it grew two or more. The magical ability of these horns to contain the waters of Styx seemingly does not shed light on the question of horns and their numbers; when an animal possesses an atypical part of the body, it is not uncommon for this part to be attributed to magical properties. There are two more indicators of the horns' outstanding status. The fact that a horn was gifted to Alexander by one of his generals (Heckel 2021, s. v. Sopater) implies that it was to be considered a great honor. The two versions agree that Alexander dedicated the horn to Apollo in Delphi, making the horn an even more extraordinary item worthy of the god himself.

Legends of unusual features and abilities of horns are characteristic of various stories of unicorns. These tales can be found within two branches of unicorn-centered traditions (Panaino 2001, 154). The first section involves a complex of legends about a seduced unicorn. This motif is frequent in Hinduistic, Jainistic, and Buddhist literature (Tagliatesta 2007, 177). The Indian versions (*Mbh.* 3. 33. 110–113; *R.* 1. 8–10) and the Tocharian variant (Pinault 2015, 197–200) present the reader with a story of a young ascetic with a horn on his forehead.⁷ The ascetic may be the son of an antelope or a similar animal that gave birth to a horned child after accidentally swallowing the seed of a fully human ascetic. The ascetic rears his unicorn son in his hermitage, far from society's temptations, until a disaster strikes a local city or realm. The catastrophe could be a drought, hunger, or a similar consequence of a god's punishment (Panaino 2001, 151). To end their suffering, the local community sends one or several girls to seduce the virtuous young ascetic.⁸ Despite his father's warnings, the unicorn boy does not succeed in resisting the girl, and after their coupling, the rain begins falling once again. It is not hard to understand the connection between the young unicorn's ascetical activities and the drought in the realm. Religious austerity and severe penance (Skt. *tapas-*) can lead an ascetic to accumulate an amount of energy similar to divine power. If this is the case, the gods can strive to diminish the ascetic's powers by presenting him with great temptation, especially in the form of an *apsaras* (Skt. *apsaras-*). If he succumbs to the temptation, the ascetic loses a portion of his powers and is no longer a threat to the gods (Puhvel 1987, 72–75). When it comes to the

⁶ Unlike Aelian, Porphyry is not mentioned by Mayor and Hayes. This omission prevented the authors from identifying Philo of Heraclea (and possibly even Nymphis) as the original source of the story, contributing to their conclusion that the relationship between Aelian's report and the poisoning plot is not known (Mayor, Hayes 2011, 5).

⁷ For a concise overview of Indian unicorn traditions and their later influences, see Buitenen 1975, 188–193.

⁸ The seduction scheme can result in the royal marriage of the ascetic and the local king's daughter. This can be seen in the *Ṛṣyaśṛṅga* story from the *Forest Book* of *Mahabharata* and in *R.* 1. 8–9.

horned ascetic, it is possible to interpret the draught as a part of a god's device⁹ to diminish the unicorn's tapas-induced powers. The seductress' mission is, therefore, to transform the potential of the boy's tapas, which can also be understood as a symbol of heat and drought, into desire and fertility (Skt. *kāma-*), embodied in the rain. One should also consider the phallic symbolism of the ascetic's horn (Panaino 2001, 153; Tagliatesta 2007, 177).

The other branch of the unicorn tradition is centered around the wondrous features of the animal's horn. Philo the Paradoxographer's story about horned asses is set in Scythia. Although the author of this research is not familiar with potential Scythian versions of this legend, it is possible to look into two other Iranian varieties of the unicorn story, where the motif of a unicorn with healing abilities has a prominent place (Panaino 2001, 157).¹⁰ The *Bundahišn* gives an extraordinarily detailed description of the primeval ass, standing in the waters of the Vourukaša sea. The animal possesses many atypical body parts, such as three legs, nine testicles, three pairs of eyes, and a single horn on its forehead. Different actions of the ass cause various changes in the waters of Vourukaša. For example, its braying causes all the good sea creatures to conceive and the evil ones to lose their unborn. Likewise, its urine purges the waters of Vourukaša from the taint of Angra Mainyu's creatures (*Bd.* 24. 10–21). *Yasna Haptanghaiti* also mentions an ass standing in the water of Vourukaša (*Yasna* 42. 4). It is explicitly stated that the ass is pious and an object of worship (aSaUUaNem;yazamaIdE).¹¹

Regarding Indian traditions of the qualities of the unicorn's horn, various sources describe a picture similar to the Iranian one. Ctesias of Cnidus reveals copious details related to the appearance and qualities of Indian unicorns, including the powers of their horns. Ctesias' unicorn is a wild ass whose horn can be used as a drinking cup. Such a cup protects the imbiber from epileptic fits. When mixed with any kind of drink, the filings of these horns also serve as protection against poisonous concoctions (Ctes. *Ind.* 45F).¹² Ctesias' accounts of Indian horned asses should be considered reliable testimonies of this tradition; as a member of the court of Artaxerxes II Mnemon, Ctesias was undoubtedly in a favorable position to gather more or less first-hand information on various matters pertaining to Iranian or Indian lore (Panaino 2001, 157).¹³ Other authors relate a similar story. In the *Life of Apollonius of Tiana*, Philostratus describes Indian wild asses, whose horns, when used as drinking vessels, protect the imbiber from various dangers, including poisoning. Philostratus notes that this kind of drinking vessel is a royal privilege (Philostr. *VA.* 3. 2).¹⁴ Aelian, as it seems, summarizes several versions of this description, mentioning Indian horses and asses whose horns are used as protection against poisoning (Ael. *NA.* 3. 41).¹⁵ After this short survey of Graeco-Roman sources, it is reasonable to look for

⁹ Indra's device, to be more specific (Puhvel 1987, 73–74).

¹⁰ Two illustrations from the *Great Mongolian Shahnameh* feature Iskandar fighting the Abyssinian monster Habash, which is represented as a unicorn (Ettinghausen 1950, 261).

¹¹ Transliteration according to the Geldner 1896 edition.

¹² κέρας δὲ ἔχουσιν ἐν τῷ μετώπῳ... τοῦ γὰρ τοιοῦτου κέρατος τὸ ρίνισμα δίδοται ἐν ποτῷ· καὶ ἔστι φυλακτήριον θανασίμων φαρμάκων... ἐκ τούτων οἱ πίνοντες (κατασκευάζουσι γὰρ ἐκπώματα) σπασμῶ, φασί, οὐ λαμβάνονται, οὔτε τῇ ἱερᾷ νόσῳ.

¹³ For a more detailed discussion of Ctesias' sources, see Nichols 2011, 21–22.

¹⁴ οὐ γὰρ οὔτε νοσήσαι τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην ὁ ἀπ' αὐτοῦ πίων οὔτε ἂν τρωθεὶς ἀλγήσαι πυρός τε διεξελθεῖν ἂν καὶ μηδ' ἂν φαρμάκοις ἀλώναι ὅποσα ἐπὶ κακῷ πίνεται, βασιλέων δὲ τὸ ἔκπωμα εἶναι καὶ βασιλεῖ μόνῳ ἀνεῖσθαι τὴν θήραν.

¹⁵ εἴ τις ἐς αὐτὰ ἐμβάλῃ φάρμακον θανατηφόρον, ὁ πίων, οὐδὲν ἐπιβουλή λυθήσει αὐτόν· ἔοικε γὰρ ἀμυντήριον τοῦ κακοῦ τὸ κέρας καὶ τοῦ ἵππου καὶ τοῦ ὄνου εἶναι.

examples of this tradition within a more original setting. In the hymns of *Atharvaveda*, there is a mention of a horned antelope with healing abilities (AV 3. 7). The antelope's horn is referred to as a cure (Skt. *bheṣaja-*), and it is used to dispel a disease (Skt. *kṣetriya-*).

The overview of these sources points to common elements of unicorn-centered legends in Indo-Iranian traditions. Both *Atharvaveda* and *Bundahišn* give prominence to the image of a taint-cleansing unicorn. The description of a three-legged animal with nine testicles and a horn can be seen as an image of accentuated virility (Panaino 2001, 173), which is also an important feature of the legend of the seduced unicorn-ascetic. In both branches of the story, the unicorn is associated with water, whether the waters belong to the Vourukaša sea or the rain caused by the coupling of the ascetic with the local girl. This comparison sheds light on Philo's story of Scythian asses and their extraordinary abilities. Although the preserved versions do not accentuate any other qualities of these animals, they possess horns able to annul the fatal abilities of the waters of Styx. Apart from that, the story only superficially seems to revolve around Alexander the Great when it focuses on the horn and its powers.

Due to several elements of Philo's story and their counterparts in Indian and Iranian legends, it is possible to agree that the episode retold by Porphyry and Aelian represents a fragment of Indo-Iranian tradition, specifically of the second branch, related to the healing abilities of unicorns' horns. To justify this conclusion, it is useful to survey the principal parallels. Both the story of Alexander's gift and the Indo-Iranian traditions are related to the horns of a normally hornless animal. In the Indo-Iranian versions, it is clear that the animal grows only one horn, while this is not explicitly mentioned in either variant of Philo's story. Indo-Iranian horns can neutralize poison or taint from liquid, whatever it may be. Alexander's gift is exceptional for its immunity to the destructive power of Styx. Lastly, it is crucial to note that the horns were gifted to the kings in the Indian version of the story. In Philo's anecdote, the horn was a royal gift, worthy not only of Alexander but of Apollo himself.

Having proven that the episode with Alexander's gift is rooted in the Indo-Iranian unicorn complex, one is left with the question of this story's relation to the accounts of Alexander's strange poisoning. It is possible to suggest a sketch of the merging and transformation of several already mentioned elements into a story of Alexander's poisoning. In the Greco-Roman version, the poison or poisonous water from the unicorn story was equated with the water of Styx as a legendary source of powerful and destructive liquid. This way, since the account of Alexander's gift does not mention that the vessel in question can negate the effect of poison, the act of gifting a horn connected to a lethal liquid could be understood only as an attempt on the ruler's life. Furthermore, the storyline compels anyone who loses track of the horn's healing features to see it as an assassination plot since it is obvious that the only reason to gift the one object able to carry the fatal water could be to transport the very water to the victim. The horns may have transformed into hooves as a result of the rationalizing tendencies of some authors; given that the mentioned animals do not grow horns, it was reasonable to suppose that the vessels were made of hooves. This could have been helped by the fact that the words *κεράτινος*, *κέρας*, or *cornu* can be misunderstood as referring to hooves (Longus 2. 28; Cato Agr. 72). This way, a horn that protects the imbiber from poisoning becomes a hoof-vessel carrying the venom.¹⁶ Finally,

¹⁶ Using hooves as drinking vessels in this context should not be confused with tales belonging to the ATU Folktale type 450: Brother and Sister, which sometimes feature hoofprints left in the soil. A parched child avoids several sets of hoofprints until finally giving in to its thirst and transforming into the animal that left the hoofprint. It is obvious that the hooves mentioned in these tales are not severed animal limbs

it is obvious that the vessel represents a royal gift in both the Indian variants and the episode with Alexander. It is possible that this detail was the original motivation for the story of Alexander and the horn — an attempt to equate Alexander and his status with, for example, Indian kings of legend.¹⁷

Lastly, what remains is to accentuate the two central points of this paper. In the first place, the story told by Philo the Paradoxographer and preserved by Porphyry of Tyre and Aelian can be nothing but an example of Indo-Iranian unicorn tradition, namely the branch focusing on the unique features of the horn. This is easily proven by comparing the exclusive status of the horn gifted to Alexander and its ability to overcome the destructive power of Styx with the elements of Indo-Iranian lore, most notably the power of the unicorn's horn to neutralize the venom and protect from disease, as well as its reputation as a royal gift. Furthermore, the stories of Alexander's poisoning can be proven to stem from the story of Alexander's gift, similar to the one told by Philo. Through several tiers of misinterpretation, the legend of a vessel given to Alexander with the intention of protecting him from harm became a device contrived to murder him.

References

- Agostini, D., Thorpe S. (eds, transl.) *The Bundahišn. The Zoroastrian Book of Creation*. Oxford, OUP, 2020.
- van Buitenen J. A. B. (transl., comm.) *Mahabharata: The Book of the Assembly Hall, the Book of the Forest*. Chicago, Chicago University, 1975.
- Casevitz M. (ed.), Jost M. (transl., comm.) *Pausanias. Description de la Grèce. Tome VIII, livre VIII — L'Arcadie*. Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2002.
- Ettinghausen R. *The Unicorn*. Washington, Freer Gallery, 1950.
- García Valdés M., Llera Fueyo L. A., Rodríguez-Noriega Guillén L. (eds) *Claudius Aelianus. De natura animalium*. Berolini et Novi Eboraci, De Gruyter, 2009.
- Gaselee S. (ed., transl.) *Longus: Daphnis and Chloe. Parthenius*. London — New York, William Heinemann, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916.
- Geldner K. F. (ed.) *Avesta, the Sacred Books of the Parsis*. Stuttgart, W. Kohlhammer, 1896.
- Heckel W. *Who's Who in the Age of Alexander and his Successors: From Chaironeia to Ipsos (338–301 BC)*. Philadelphia, Casemate, 2021.
- Hooper Davis W. (ed., transl.) *Marcus Porcius Cato — On Agriculture. Marcus Terentius Varro — On Agriculture*. Cambridge — London, HUP, William Heinemann, 1934.
- Hornblower S., Pelling C. (eds) *Herodotus Histories Book VI*. Cambridge, CUP, 2017.
- Jones C. P. (ed., transl.) *Philostratus. Life of Apollonius of Tyana (I–IV)*. Cambridge — London, HUP, 2014.
- Kroll W. *Historia Alexandri Magni — Pseudo Callisthenes. Recensio vetusta*. Hildesheim, Weidmann, 2005.
- Lenfant D. (ed., transl., comm.) *Ctésias de Cnide. La Perse. L'Inde. Autres fragments*. Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2004.
- Mayor, A., Hayes, A. The Deadly Styx River and the Death of Alexander. *Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics* 2011, 1–30.
- Most G. W. (ed., transl.) *Hesiod. Theogony. Works and Days*. Cambridge — London, HUP, 2006.
- Nichols A. (intr., transl., comm.) *Ctesias on India*. London, Bloomsbury, 2011.
- Panaino A. Between Mesopotamia and India. Some Remarks about the Unicorn Cycle in Iran, in: R. M. Whiting (ed.) *Mythology and Mythologies. Methodological Approaches to Intercultural Influences*. Helsinki, University of Helsinki, 2001, 149–179.

but a way of triggering the child's transformation into a certain animal (see *Brüderchen und Schwesterchen*, *Sister Alionushka*, *Brother Ivanushka*, *Burdilluni*, etc.).

¹⁷ Mayor and Hayes briefly mention the legendary features of unicorns' horns, but they do not delve into any further analysis of this motif. From their standpoint, the potential connection with the story of the unicorn is a secondary development, while the poisoning plot is the primary one (Mayor, Hayes 2011, 5). The research of Mayor and Hayes is, in essence, a toxicology- and hydrology-oriented analysis, which is quite different in aim and method from the research at hand.

- Perrin B. (ed., transl.) *Plutarch Lives: Demosthenes and Cicero. Alexander and Caesar*. Cambridge — London, HUP, William Heinemann, 1967.
- Pinaut G. J. The Legend of the Unicorn in the Tocharian Version. *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies* 2015, 38, 191–222.
- Puhvel J. *Comparative Mythology*. Baltimore — London, Johns Hopkins UP, 1987.
- Robson Iliff E. (ed., transl.) *Arrian. Anabasis Alexandri (V–VII), Indica*. Cambridge — London, HUP, William Heinemann, 1966.
- Runia D. Philonic Nomenclature. *Studia Philonica Annual* 1994, 6, 1–27.
- Smith A. (ed.) *Porphyrii Philosophi fragmenta. Studgardiae* — Lipsiae, Teubner, 1993.
- Suda On Line: *Byzantine Lexicography*. S. v. Νύμφις (nu 598): <http://www.cs.uky.edu/~raphael/sol/sol-cgi-bin/search.cgi> (accessed: 22.06.2022).
- Tagliatesta F. Iconography of the Unicorn from India to Italian Middle Ages. *East and West* 2007, 57 (1), 175–191.
- Whitney W. D. (transl., comm.), Lanman Ch. R. (rev., ed.) *Atharva-Veda Saṃhitā. First Half*. Cambridge, HUP, 1904.

Четыре копыта и рог: как (не) отравить Александра Македонского*

Исидора Толич

Университет Белграда, Философский факультет,
Республика Сербия, 11000, Белград, Чика Любина, 18–20; isidora.tolic@f.bg.ac.rs, isidoraztolic@gmail.com

Для цитирования: Tolić I. Four Hooves and a Horn: How (Not) to Poison Alexander the Great. *Philologia Classica* 2022, 17 (2), 269–276. <https://doi.org/10.21638/spbu20.2022.206>

Некоторые античные авторы передают загадочную историю о попытке убить Александра Македонского посредством яда или ядовитой воды, находящейся в странном сосуде — в копыте коня, мула или осла. Цитируя Каллимаха и Филона Парадоксографа, Порфирий Тирский дает повод поверить, что упоминание сосудов, изготовленных из копыт, является неправильным толкованием чаш, сделанных из рога, или, иными словами, рогов для питья. Предполагая, что сосуд, о котором идет речь, действительно был рогом для питья, получаем необычную картину: Александр скончался, выпив ядовитой воды из рога животного, лишённого рогов. Можно проследить развитие этой легенды и догадаться о ее происхождении, изучив общие черты двух различных традиций. Это греческая легенда о реке Стикс и ее смертоносной воде и индоиранская традиция о чудесных свойствах рога единорога, засвидетельствованная в иранских, индийских и греческих источниках. Изучив релевантные тексты, мы заключаем, что рог из истории Филона представлял собой легендарный дар индийских правителей, предназначенный для спасения Александра Македонского от разного рода опасностей. Последовательное искажение превратило сказочный «оберег» в орудие убийства. Автор статьи доказывает, таким образом, два тезиса: 1) история, рассказанная Порфирием в *Styg.* 375F, является частью индоиранской традиции о единорогах и их чудесных свойствах; и 2) легенда об отравлении представляет собой трансформированную и неверно истолкованную историю о поднесенном царю спасительном даре.

Ключевые слова: река Стикс, единорог, царский дар, индоиранская традиция, Александр Македонский, парадоксография.

Received: 26.06.2022

Accepted: 27.09.2022

* Статья подготовлена при поддержке гранта Министерства образования Республики Сербия (№ 451-03-68/2022-14/200163).