

# ARCHAEOLOGIA

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## RELIC HUMANOIDS IN ANTIQUITY

HAVING TRAVELED ACROSS THE CAUCASUS WITH THE ALMASTY, (THE RELIC HUMANOID DESCRIBED BY EYEWITNESSES REPORTS GATHERED THERE (N° 269), AND THEN DESCRIBED ITS BEHAVIOR (N° 276), ARCHAEOLOGIA NOW BRINGS YOU BACK TO EARLY HISTORY TO MEET THE EARLIEST KNOWN RELIC HUMANOIDS. WHETHER ON ANTIQUE PHENICIAN CUPS OR IN MAJOR DOCUMENTS SUCH AS THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH OR THE BIBLE, WE FIND EVERYWHERE THE SILHOUETTE OF A HAIRY BIPED WHOSE FEATURES, PHYSICAL AS WELL AS BEHAVIORAL, ARE STRIKINGLY SIMILAR TO THOSE OF THE ALMASTY.

by MARIE-JEANNE KOFFMAN



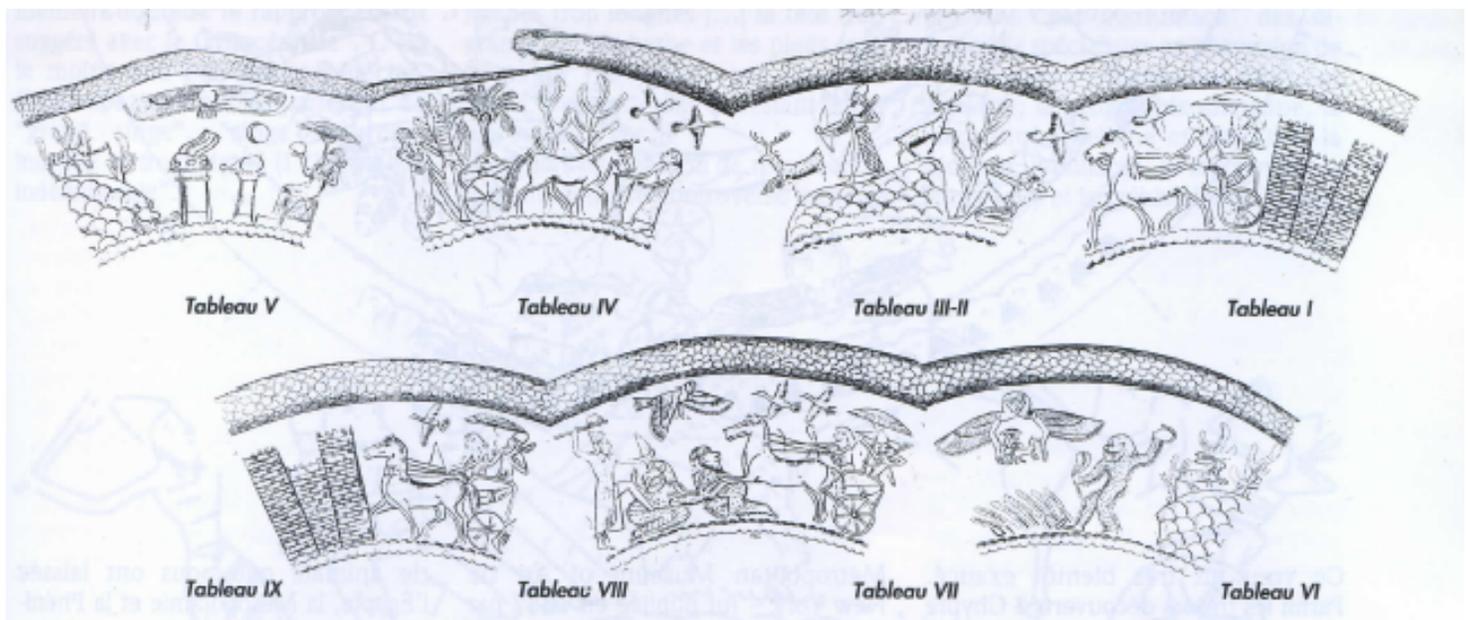
*The foreword of the great drama of history is whispered by far away voices, from such a distance that only a faint echo reaches our ears through the centuries. Transmitted in some way, myths, the name of former races, some events, make up a confusing mixture from which one must attempt to read some truths.*  
*J.-J. Ampère, 1806*

*It is strange to find that many myths correspond, quite accidentally, to some discoveries of modern science.*  
*J. Lacarrière, 1984.*

When, in 1957, Soviet scientists first addressed, most carefully, the problem of the so-called “Snow Man”, their first step was to look into the past and examine mythology. The absence of the subject in one or the other of these domains would have brought to naught the hypothesis of its survival today. The first results of that enquiry were beyond expectations: everywhere, the “wild man”, *Homo sylvestris*, *Homo troglodytes*, accompany the other biped, Man, throughout its history, as the source of the shepherd’s superstitious fear,

the curiosity of the naturalist, the confusion of the theologian, the reflexion of the philosopher.

The wild man is found in all mythologies. It might have been safer to present an overview of the problem by quoting some famous celebrity of science, medicine or history: Lucretius, Plutarque, St. Augustine, Linné, Montaigne, Prjevalsky, Kozlov, or D. Larrey, the chief surgeon of Napoleon’s armies – a few among many who took an interest in the nature of “wild men”. However, in the interest of continuity, I chose to start this long story in deep Antiquity. **34**



On the previous page, the Praeneste cup (Praeneste, Latium), VIII-VII century BCE. Its outer friese tells the story of a hunt by an Assyrian lord, interrupted by the intervention of a hairy biped, coming out of a cave to repel the hunter and then pursued and killed. Above, sketches of each of the panels illustrating the episode.

### HUNTING A HAIRY BIPED AS SHOWN ON A PHENICIAN PLATE.

Among the many items discovered in 1876 in the great Etruscan necropolis of Palestrina, the former Praeneste, in Latium, one of the cups immediately attracted the attention of archaeologists. Kept today in the Museo Nazionale de Villa Giulia, this silver, gold-plated patera is perfectly conserved. Its inner surface is decorated with a central medaillon, surrounded by circular bands depicting engraved figures. It is clearly of Phenician origin. The tomb in which it was found was dated to around 700 BCE but some of its motifs, of ancient source, might date from much older times.

Dr. W. Helbig first described the artifact in 1876, but it is Ch. Clermont-Ganneau, co-director of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes, who first recognized in the upper band the sequence of episodes of a hunt in the hills by an Assyrian noble.

**Frame (Tableau) I-II-III-IV:** coming out of the city in his chariot, the lord reaches the hills and finds and kills a deer, then butchers it in the shade of the palm trees while his slave looks after the horses and sets up a place for his master to rest.

**Tableau V.** The lord relaxes in the shade of his umbrella. An urn with a simpulum rests on a plinth; the meat cooks on a grill (an altar?). Thankful to the gods who have smiled on him, the lord raises an offering to the heavens, where there appears the winged disk of a solar deity. However, out of the gaping mouth of cave there emerges the head of a hideous, seemingly human creature observing the scene.

**Tableau VI.** Suddenly, the creature leaps out of its cave. It turns out to be a man-like biped, bulky and covered with hair. It has uprooted nearby plants and wields a projectile in its left hand. Scared by this intrusion, a hare flees away quickly. But the gods

are watching. The goddess Astarte takes the lord and its team in a protective embrace.

**Tableau VII.** Immediately, the lord takes action and attacks. He shoots at the fleeing creature and pursues it in his chariot.

**Tableau VIII.** The lord steps off his chariot. He grabs the creature by the hair with his left hand, and strikes it with his axe, ignoring the wretched creature's timid gesture of self-defense or call for pity.

**Tableau IX.** The day ended well. The whole team returns to the city. In spite of the unique nature of the Praeneste cup, M. Clermont-Ganneau hoped that "in some corner of the Mediterranean" one would some day find variations on the same theme which would allow a better interpretation of its message".



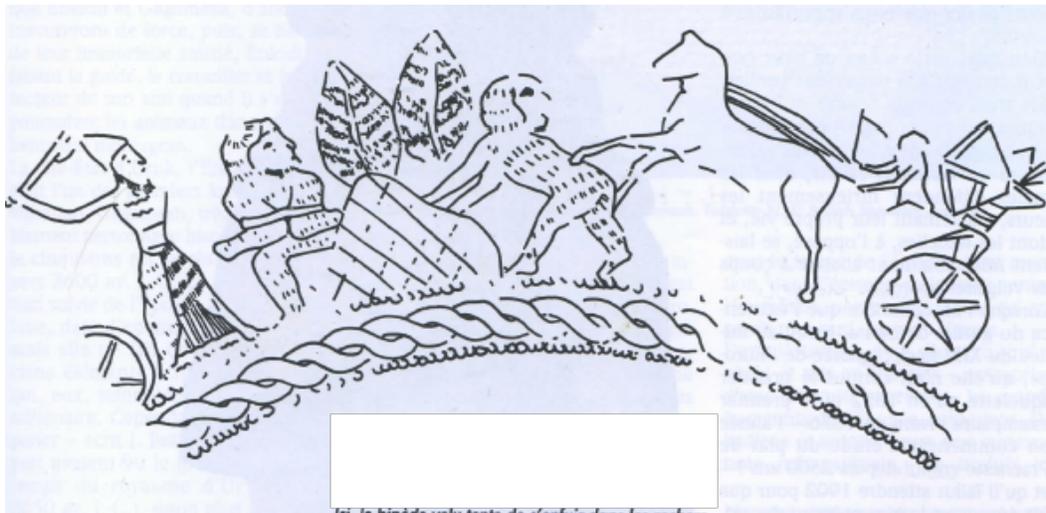
**The Kourion biped cup. (Cyprus, VI century BCE, as described by C. Marquand. But for a few details, its outer friese tells the same story as the Paenestre cup.**

This wish was soon satisfied. Among the treasures discovered in Cyprus by Mr. di Cesnola between 1865 and 1876, one from Kourion (Curium) consisted of piles of damaged Phenician patera, one of which repeated, slightly modified, the same "Hunting Day" and its protagonists. In this one, the hunted crature does not try to flee in the open, but seeks refuge in the hills, climbing over the rocks. Once captured, it is tied up before being killed. This cup, now property of the

Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, was published in 1887 by A. Marquand who set its date of origin, probably locally, to the middle of the VI century BCE.

Hunting was a permanent occupation for the men of antiquity. Its different techniques, the preys themselves, both wild and domesticated, were a basic graphic art element, harking back to the Paleolithic. There is no need to insist on the degree of perfection of animal

representation bequeathed by Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Phenicia: the anatomical authenticity which allows the modern zoologist to recognize mammals, birds and fish, down to the species level; the realism of the postures; and the accuracy of the movement, reflecting long and intimate co-habitation. The role of hunting scenes was not merely to entertain, but also to teach: realism was important.



**Detail of the Kourion cup showing the flight and capture of the hairy biped.  
American Journal of Archaeology, Baltimore, 1887, vol III, plate XXX.**

### **AN UNIDENTIFIABLE TROGLODYTIC BIPED...**

One can readily understand how the biped appearing in the “lord’s hunting day” excited the curiosity of archaeologists. Well aware of the precision of animal representation among the ancients, no one could cast doubt on its zoological realism. The problem was to specify its taxonomic position among primates. Already, its discoverer doctor W. Helbig did not dare venture an opinion and sought advice from a naturalist, Dr. Boll, who while admitting that “the type cannot be precisely identified with any race” leaned towards a *Cynocephalus* monkey (*Cynocephalus sphinx*).

Fr. Lenormant (1876) suggested, “due allowance being made,” a Barbary Ape, small macaque of the Atlas mountains. Only about 65 cm tall, there would be a problem of proportions. Ch. Clermont-Ganneau also consulted a zoologist, M.A. Milne-Edwards. They both thought “that the identification as a cynocephalus was most doubtful.” A rather weak objection ! Warily, others

suggested “great apes”, “anthropomorphic troglodytic ape”, “unclassifiable biped”. It was Ch. Clermont-Ganneau who, insisting on the animal nature of the subject, was the first to propose, with much reticence, a gorilla. The presence of the deer, a specimen of the palearctic fauna, is inconsistent with an African animal. The cave, “appearing twice” also seems to exclude “anthropomorphism.”

### **..... RELATED TO GORILLAS?**

For lack of a better idea, Clermont-Ganneau fell back on the gorilla, aware that the Carthaginians – and thus the Phoenicians – knew about “gorillai” from the skins that Hanno had brought back from his “Voyage.” From then on relying on the famous explorer, writers would side with the gorilla (Marquand, 1887; Perrot et Chipiez, 1885; W.-M. Dermott, 1938; B. Brentjes, 1965) although with much hesitation: “...the arms are too short”, “...the legs are too long”, “...the beard and the feet are too human-like”, in Dermott’s words, who nevertheless stuck to the gorilla interpretation.

There is no point in reviving here the controversy surrounding Hanno’s Voyage, known only from a Greek manuscript of the X<sup>th</sup> century, 1450 years after the event. It’s impossible not to mention it however, as it is pertinent to our topic.

The usual interpretation of the Voyage is based on Hanno’s meeting with hairy primates, called “gorillai” by interpreters, implying that the Carthaginian fleet had reached the Gulf of Guinea, a conclusion supported by the mention of a fiery mountain identified with Mt. Cameroun in eruption.

Many contradictions – which need not be enumerated - had from the very beginning, in the XVI century, caught the eye of scholars.

An inventory of all views expressed on this issue was presented by B. Heuvelmans in a solidly documented analysis, bringing “in absentia” the knowledge of specialists on Punic history, ancient geography, Hellenic and African linguistic, geology, folklore, toponymy, the fauna and pre-history of West Africa, maritime technology,

hydrological and meteorological coastal sailing conditions. The conclusion of this erudite review is categorical: it is quite possible that a Carthaginian fleet may have sailed along the Atlantic coast of Africa in the V<sup>th</sup> century BCE; it is impossible that it could have reached beyond 28°N, south of today's Morocco.

As to the gorillas, the skins brought back by the Hanno expedition could not have belonged to them for two reasons: we have mentioned one, of a geographical nature. Hanno was still 5,000 km short of gorilla habitat. The other, of a zoological nature, is also worth mentioning. At the end of their journey, the Carthaginians found "an island full of wild men. The females were the most numerous. They were completely hairy and the interpreters called them "Gorillai". We chased after the males but couldn't catch any of them as they were good climbers and defended themselves with stones. But we captured three females. Biting and scratching, they wouldn't follow their captors. We killed them and brought their skins back to Carthage.."

Everything in this story is foreign to the nature of real gorillas, heavy and placid animals, not living in community, incapable of rapid tree-climbing, ferocious defenders of their kin, to the sacrifice of their own lives, and whose females, in contrast, are easily clubbed into submission.

Considering that the existence of gorillas remained unknown to European science until the XIX century, the first skeleton obtained in 1852 and the first live individual in 1870, - that same year that the Praeneste cup, buried for 2,500 years, began to be investigated - and that one had to wait until 1902 until the mighty mountain gorilla was discovered, it is most likely that the people of the Mediterranean were not aware of their existence. So, unaware as the world of western antiquity was of the existence of gorillas, is

it possible that it knew of the existence of some other kind of large human-like primate? The most ancient literary monuments of humanity, the Bible and the Epic of Gilgamesh appear to answer this in the affirmative.

### ENKIDU IN THE EPIC OF GILGAMESH

In response to the complaints of the inhabitants of Uruk about the arrogance of their king, Gilgamesh, the goddess Anuru "washed her hands, took a lump of clay" and created a wild man, Enkidu, whose role was to counteract the king's violence, then to become his friend, a courageous and faithful companion in their warring adventures, so outrageous that eventually the gods had to intervene and in default of condemning Gilgamesh

decided to sacrifice Enkidu. Five millenia of literature have not surpassed the poignant beauty of those words inscribed in clay at the dawn of history by Man, lamenting at the pain of separation, proclaiming his horrified refusal of death and despair at his helplessness. However, there is here another aspect claiming our attention. It is a hunter who reveals the existence of Enkidu. Frightened, he describes it to his father: "I saw a strange man from the hills. He has hair all over his body and head hair like a woman, but standing, like ears of wheat. ...He is as muscular as a stone fallen from heaven, he is the strongest...He constantly roam in the desert, the plains and the hills in the company of the animals. He knows nothing of Man and Country. He browses with the



**Gilgamesh – Stele from Khorsabad, VIII Century BCE  
Musee du Louvre**

gazelles, and drinks from the springs with the wild prides.“ \* Strangely, this creature regularly stands as a protector between the hunter and his wild prey.

The father knows how to tame such a creature, with the help of a sacred whore whose mission is “to teach this innocent wild man what a woman has to offer.” She convinces Enkidu to abandon the wilderness. “She takes him by the hand and leads him to a sheep-pen.” The sheperds marvel at his resemblance to Gilgamesh—the ideal Man – and at his powerful build and strength. He is offered bread, which “he examines with mistrust: he didn’t know about bread.” Or “beer”. “He cleaned his body with water and having anointed himself with oil, he looked like a man.”

Now tamed, Enkidu binds with his masters and serves them faithfully against wild beasts. In a third step, the woman, clearly a born psychologist and ethologist, continues her experiment. She now takes her protégé to Uruk, the capital. Again, “astounded crowds gather around him”. Clearly, in spite of his having washed and oiled his pelt, Enkidu was still far from looking like a perfect human. It is in Uruk that Enkidu and Gilgamesh first vie in a show of strngth and then become lifelong friends, Enkidu becoming the advisor and protector of his friend when hunting dangerous animals in the mountains.

The city-state of Uruk , biblical Erech, was one of the first centers of civilization. Gilgamesh, most likely a historical figure, was its fifth king (after the flood !) around 2,600 BCE. The first continuous version of the epic, \* Quotations from various French and Russian translations of the Epic, especially Bottéro’s “L’Épopée de Gilgamesh”, Gallimard, Paris, 1992.

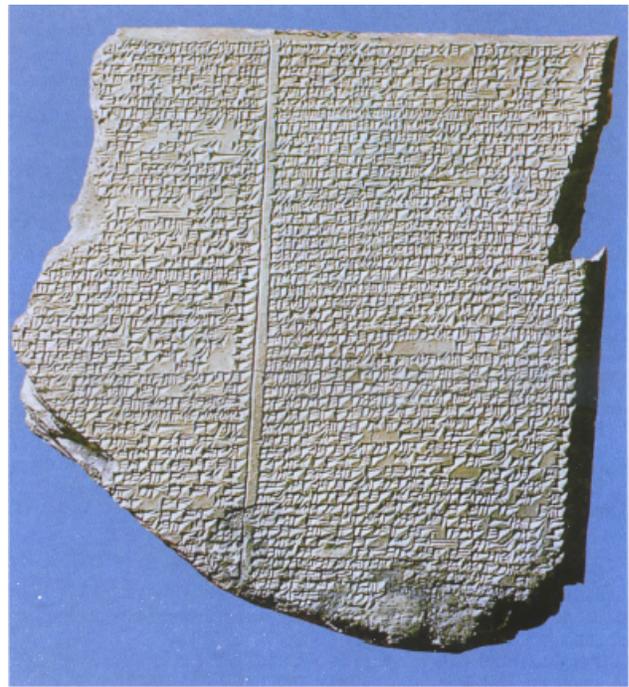
from Babylon, dates from around 1,650 BCE, but it merely gathers together older fragments, written in Sumerian, dating from the end of the third millenium BCE. However, it is quite likely, writes J. Bottéro, that most of these fragments originated earlier, in the days of the kingdom of Ur (around 2,650 BCE) if not earlier. It’s almost as if the Epic of Gilgamesh antedated the arrival of its protagonist. This sounds like a joke, but it is suggested by the views of some Russian assyriologists who find sources of the story in the IVth millenium BCE, at the dawn of writing. In the oldest versions, Enkidu, called Ea-bani, is not Gilgamesh’s friend, but well and truly his slave.

“The theme of the Enkidu story, says professor B.Porchnev, is about a man-like animal, cleverly tamed by hunters and shepherds, and used, first as a guardian of the herd, and then as an auxiliary in the hunt” handy in tracking and destroying similar

creatures, perhaps older and wilder.

It also seems, after hearing about Enkidu’s “father”, “mother” and “brothers” that Enkidu stands for a whole population of man-like creatures living “between the hills bordering the eastern Mediterranean and the Syrian desert and the mid and lower basin of the Euphrates ” (B.Porchnev). I would add to that also the much larger Zagros range, much nearer Sumer. Besides, the oldest versions of the Epic speak of the Zagros rather than the Lebanon in the episode of the struggle against Humbaba.

J. Bottéro gathered and put into French - a formidable task – the main fragments of the Epic, in Sumerian, Akkadian and other languages. In a curious side-note he says that: “I have translated by the word “savage,” whenever this adjective often used in describing Enkidu appears for the first time, the word which is regularly used elsewhere to



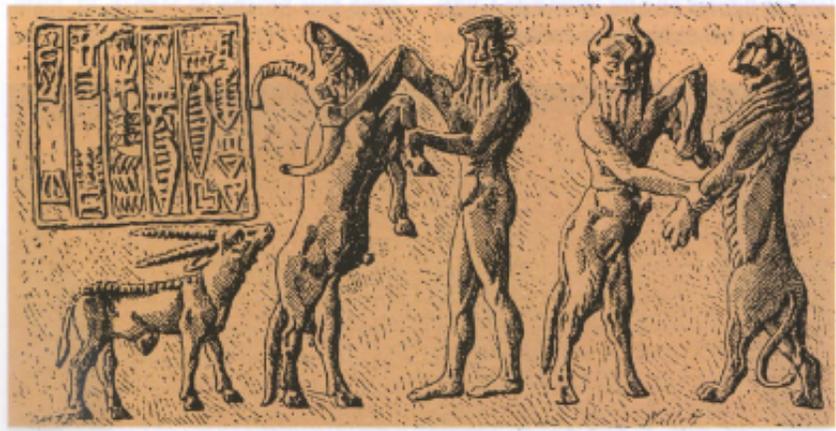
**Fragment of the Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet XI  
British Museum, London**

denote the human prototype: “a sketch of a human”. In the Epic, this “sketch” of a human is placed in a precise ecological context thanks to frequent reminders of its various biotopes: “born in the steppe”, “raised by a gazelle”, fed by the “milk of the wild ass”, he also comes down the mountain, which he knows as well as the forest.

Gilgamesh’s lamentations over the corpse of his friend also suggest an ecological context: “cry over him, pathways of the Cedar mountain, narrow mountain passes, ...Mourn him, bears, hyenas, panthers and tigers, goats and lynxes, lions and buffalos, deer and chamois...” a scene where mountain fauna predominates.

Gilgamesh and Enkidu also appear on cylindrical seals from the Euphrates area, where they struggle with the heavenly bull, the source of their woes, and of course with a lion. Gilgamesh, the man, is drawn as such, while Enkidu, in spite of his repeatedly noted resemblance to the former, is shown in a way where his animal nature is recognizable. Man-beast, man emerging from the beast, living antithesis of spirit and brutishness .... the artist is not concerned with metaphysics. Simply and logically, he draws Enkidu as a hybrid: upper half human, lower half beast. Not any wild beast, which would make sense, but a familiar animal, the first domesticated by man, a split-hoof beast, a bull or a goat.

A shaggy head, with pointed ears, a human torso, hairy thighs and legs, a tail, forked hooves: here’s a character



Gilgamesh and Enkidu. Rolled out cylindrical seal. First Chaldean Empire. Around 1,500 BCE . Metropolitan Museum, New York. In G.Perrot and Ch.Chipiez, op.cit. vol II, p. 6

destined for a long and fruitful career!

### HAIRIES IN THE BIBLE

The Bible also speaks of hairy man-like creatures: the Hairies, or Se’irim.

What is the message that Rebecca, concerned about the struggle between her twins in her womb, hears from Jehovah himself (Genesis, 25, 22-24):

“Two nations in your womb two people from your loins shall issue. One people over the other shall prevail, the elder the younger’s slave.”

So, who is the older, who of the “two people” is the first to appear? A creature covered with reddish hair (“all over, as with a coat of hair”, “hirsute all over as the pelt of a beast”) who spends his time roaming in nature (“a man of the field”), a dumb-witted brute unable to give a name to the stew of lentils he begs for and which he doesn’t hesitate in his crude hunger to trade for his right as first-born, which he has no understanding of. He is so hairy that in the famous substitution episode, which Jacob

fears precisely for that reason (“Esau, my brother is a hairy man, and I am not. My father might perhaps feel me !”)

Rebecca has to hide the (“hairless”) arms and the neck of her favorite son with the skins of two freshly killed fawns, and to cover him with Esau’s clothing, reeking from his powerful smell.

Isaac’s benediction is irrevocable and “the first people” will be forever exiled from society: “Your dwelling will be away from the Earth’s richness and from the dew of Heaven above”.(Genesis 27,39) Thus, while Jacob became Israel and the father of God’s “Chosen People,” Esau the Hairy (Se’ir), the Red-Haired (Edom), withdrew into the mountains called after him, long inhabited by “people” feared by Israel.

The concept of Hairies (Se’irim) was clear to the first translators of the Old Testament and the Seventy did not equivocate as to the meaning of the word. The translation by learned Hebrew doctors and theologians, held today as among the most faithful because its age, language and source, was aimed

at the Jewish diaspora of the Grek world. It had to be understood in that context. So, the Hairies are presented explicitly as Satyrs. The Vulgate uses that word or simply a literal translation: "Pilosi." "Satyrs" will continue to be used in all European versions. Only the Russians will speak of an animal more familiar to them: the "Lieschi", or forest being: a "Sylvan". Poland, catholic and also Slavic, also uses "satyr" but specifies that they are hairy forest people. (Biblia Tysiaclesia, 1965).

However, such intruders from pagan mythology began to bother the exegetes. Was it the ghost of Enkidu, with his forked hooves, or a slip in transcription caused

by the a confusion of vowels (Se'ir and Sa'ir)? It turned out that from the XIX century Revised Versions onwards, "Satyr" is progressively replaced by "billy-goat", or if retained, subject to puzzling footnotes. Such as, for example, the following, offered by a admittedly brilliant biblical scholar: "Satyr - a goat-like demon living in the desert." For a zoologist, a rather enigmatic description! Or, from the Osty Bible: "Satyrs - kind of local demons perhaps imagined in the shape of billy-goats."

Many reasons, profane as well as religious, cast doubt on this revised interpretation of the antique idea of "Hairies". First of all, just like Enkidu, the Hairies exist within a well-

defined faunistic environment. Just listen to Isaiah calling for the "total destruction" of Edom or Babylon, whose lands will henceforth belong to the "animals of the desert". "They will dwell there over the ages and will be their master forever" decrees Jehovah, who sets them there by "his own hand". (Isaiah 34).

"her land will become blazing pitch,  
from generation to generation it will lie desolate;  
the desert owl and the hedgehog will live there...  
...so will the barn-owl and the raven...and the satyrs will loudly call to each other.

The Jerusalem Bible uses Satyrs; M. Chouraqui writes either billy-goats or satyrs.

It would seem however, that in such specific cases the zoological context does not support "billy-goat" ....it is hard to imagine billy goats inhabiting the ruins and calling each other.

Finally, the "billy-goat" version becomes non-sensical in those texts forbidding certain behaviors. Leviticus, the moral and legal code of the Jews, condemns to death any attempts at inbreeding. It ordains (Levit. 17:7) that "The sons of Israel will no longer sacrifice to those satyrs with whom they prostituted themselves.. This is a perpetual law, for them and their descendants."

Were the Hebrews so short of spirit that they sacrificed goats to goats?



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The second part of this article will be published in the next number of *Archaeologia*.

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Commentaries. the Osty Bible: "Satyrs – the Hebrew word (the Hairies) describes billy-goats, and also (?) local demons, roaming in ruins and, in the end, idols and false gods." A. Chouraqui's Bible: "the term means idols, demons or evil spirits said to haunt deserts and the wilderness." The Jerusalem Bible: "Satyrs" – the Hebrew word means "billy goat" and also applies to animal-like spirits said to haunt ruins and deserted areas. "

Apart from the problems of having to deal with spirits and genies, one must also look for them in ruins or in the desert.

Besides, there exist straightforward explanations of the meaning of the word "Se'irim" in Leviticus. Thus, the Leviticus Rabbah, one of the oldest known Midrashin, and a great classic of rabbinical literature had already addressed this. Yonah N. bin Aaron, doctor in theology (1961), reminds us that, to make sure that the casual reader does not confuse the "Se'irim" mentioned in this passage with the hairy billy goats ("Se'irei izzim") of the preceding verses (dealing with ritual sacrifices of bulls and goats), Leviticus Rabbah, the oldest judaic exegesis specifies that: "these Se'irim are none other than the destructors, the sons of Esau". The sons of Esau, the Hairy, expelled from human society!

Might it not be with a parallel concern for polarisation and rejection of coarse and heavy man-like creatures that Zoroastrianism denounces the cult of devas, hairy, brawny creatures living in the hills, fighting by throwing rocks or wielding broken branches, to

whom sacrifices were made of precious domestic animals. Developed around the VII-VI century BCE, this doctrine did not condemn belief in the reality of devas, which it acknowledged. It simply demoted them from the rank of venerated beings to that of "unclean", to be rejected (Porchnev, 1963).

Another name for the Hairies, Shedim, appears more rarely in the Bible, which seems to prefer the goat metaphor. Nevertheless, Shedim are found in myriads in rabbinical texts (B.Teyssèdre). And they are indeed hairy human-like beings, as seen on the ornamental capital of a XIV century Haggadah (image on p.41). The 21<sup>st</sup> letter of the Hebrew alphabet, שׁ (sh) is surrounded by figures which have it as the first letter of their name: lion (shahal), fox (shu'al), lynx, and two shedim, in the company of members of the fauna described in the texts.

### HAIRY BIPEDS ON A SCYTHIAN MIRROR

Lets leave for a moment the Fertile Crescent for the realm of another antique civilization, that of the Scythians, whose tumuli cover the steppes and the foothills of the North Caucasus.

Among the burial goods found in one of these tumuli in 1903 in Keremes, there was a locally crafted mirror, today in the Ermitage museum, with eight gold panels on its back. Besides two or three symbolic figures, the artist has drawn in the famously realistic style of the steppe people a sample of representatives of the local fauna: lion, auroch, wolf, tiger, mouflon, bear, eagle, jackal...and a pair of robust hairy bipeds, reminiscent of their Etruscan and Cypriot contemporaries. (End of the VII century BCE). 42

