The *perdum*-mule, a mount for distinguished persons in Mesopotamia during the first half of the second millennium BC

by

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[First. Unnumbered note: (*) Bibliography and sigla of the Old Assyrian texts cited in this article are detailed in C. Michel, *Old Assyrian Bibliography*, Old Assyrian Archives. Studies 1, Leiden, 2003.]

Abstract:

Among the many equids used at the beginning of the second millennium B.C. in Northern Mesopotamia, the *perdum*, an hybrid, is attested only in few corpuses: the Old Assyrian merchant archives found in Central Anatolia in the ancient town Kaniš and dated to the 19th and 18th centuries B.C., the royal archives of Mari, Northern Syria, from the 18th century B.C., the tablets from Ugarit, half a millennium later, or even in the Bible. The aim of this article is to analyse the use and the value of the *perdum*, compared to the picture given by the other equids documented in texts, iconography and by the archaeozoology. The *perdum*-mule appears as a ridden animal, used mostly by kings and high dignitaries.

Traditionally Mesopotamia defines the region bounded by the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, but in a more conventional way, it covers the whole area where people used cuneiform script on clay tablets, from Iran to Anatolia, from the Zagros mountains to the Persian Gulf. The area concerned by this study is limited mainly to Anatolia and Syria.

Equids in the Ancient Near East are divided into three different groups: asses (*equus asinus*), half-asses (*equus hemionus*) and horses (*equus caballus*), and their hybrids. The studies on this subject are already numerous, especially for the written documentation of the third millennium B.C.; thus this paper is focused on a particular animal, the *perdum*, a hybrid, attested only in few
1. Donkeys and horses in the Old Assyrian documentation

1.1. The Assyrian overland trade in the second millennium B.C.

At the beginning of the second millennium B.C., the inhabitants of the city-state of Aššur, not far from Mosul in modern Iraq, organize intensified commercial exchanges with central Anatolia. Large donkey caravans coming from Aššur transport tin and textiles to Asia Minor, during a six weeks trip over a distance of more than thousand kilometers. On the way back, much smaller transports bring to Aššur gold and silver. In order to make their transactions easier, the Assyrian merchants set up trading colonies where they settle permanently.

The central colony is in Kaniš, near modern Kayseri, where archaeologists found, in the lower city, a quarter housing the traders and their warehouses. More than 20 000 cuneiform tablets written in the Old Assyrian dialect where discovered in the houses, inhabited either by Assyrians or local people. These texts, mostly private letters, contracts, loans and memoranda, document the overland Assyrian trade and give a lot of details about the organisation of caravans and the transportation of goods.

Tin and textiles are transported from Aššur to Anatolia on asses. The donkeys (akkadian emāru(m)/imēru(m), sumerian ANŠE) are bought near Aššur, in a breeding area, for 20 shekels (= 170 g) of silver each. The traders look for black donkeys, a sturdy variety. In fact, asses are heavily loaded and the long trip across mountains and steppe wears them out. Some asses die on the way. Each animal can carry 90 kilos of merchandise attached to its back. The donkey harness, which costs 2 or 3 shekels (about 20 g) of silver, consists of a packsaddle to which a pair of sacks is tied, hanging on both sides of the animal. A third bag is fixed on the top of the packaging. During the travel, the asses are conducted by donkey drivers, hired for a fixed salary. Each donkey driver is in charge of two or three animals. But some caravans may amount up to 300 loaded donkeys.

When they arrive in Anatolia, merchants sell tin and textiles, but also some donkeys for a price around 30 shekels of silver per head. They just keep few of them for the transport of gold and silver back to Aššur and some others to bring the merchandise to different trading colonies inside Asia Minor.

1.2. Different means of goods

After the travel between Aššur and Asia Minor, the many asses which arrived safely to Kaniš must thus have been available to carry goods inside Anatolia. However, they do not appear often in the texts in this particular use, perhaps because they are not negotiated in Kaniš, but somewhere else, together with the merchandise they are transporting. On the contrary the hiring of local porters from one town to another is mentioned. These men could carry about 30 kg of textiles, but also copper or barley.

The heavy and bulky goods could be transported also across Asia Minor by four-wheeled wagons drawn by donkeys or oxen. Agricultural products like barley and straw, materials for construction as wood and reed or even large quantities of merchandise, copper and textiles, are thus loaded on rented wagons generally drawn by a pair of animals. The use of wagons allows to carry much more merchandise than with asses or porters, but it is also the slowest means of transport.

Some other written sources from about the same period distinguish between the use of the donkey and the oxen for the transport of goods. Thus the royal archives discovered in the Mari palace (18th century B.C.) illustrate the use of the donkey as a burden animal for the
transportation of various commodities: metal, precious stones, textiles, wool, bitumen, cereals, oil, salt... stored in different kinds of containers: leather bags, goatskins, pieces of textiles... The caravans of about a dozen of donkeys are much smaller than those attested in the Kaniš tablets, but they also travel on long distances, some of them coming from southern Mesopotamia. On the contrary, the oxen works as a draught animal for voluminous products on small distances.³

1.3. The use of the horse at the beginning of the 11th millennium B.C.

The donkey was domesticated in Mesopotamia and Anatolia at the end of the fourth millennium B.C. It is generally admitted that the oldest remains found in Anatolia and belonging to domesticated horses dated to the beginning of the second millennium B.C. More recently, some authors proved the presence of domesticated horses at the end of the fourth millennium B.C. in Anatolia and Israel. These animals seem to appear in Mesopotamia no later than the third third of the third millennium B.C.² The cuneiform tablets uncovered at Ebla and dating from the middle of the third millennium show that people living in Syria knew the existence of the horse.

The horse is also attested in the royal archives of Mari, at the beginning of the second millennium B.C. The inhabitants of Mari buy their horses in Karkemiš, a center of Anatolian horse trade. Another origin for these animals seems to be located in the Zagros area. According to the Mari documentation, the horse is expensive and used mostly as a draught animal for ceremonial and war chariots. It is also attested a few times for riding.⁷ Horse riding is also mentioned in the 18th century tablets of Šubat-Enlil (Tell Leilan), for particular occasions as for a quick raid during a battle.⁸ In the private archives of Kaniš, the horse is very surprisingly absent. The classical akkadian word for this animal, sissī u(m) (sumerian ANŠE.KUR.RA), is never attested in the tablets, except in the title rabi sissī ē which can be translated as “horse-master”.⁹ There are a few texts, mostly silver loans, concerning the commercial activities of the rabi sissī ē, an Anatolian officer, and his wife.¹⁰ Half of these tablets do not deal with breeding activities, but some letters quoting silver transactions with the wife of the rabi sissī ē mention also some perdum-equids. However, it is not completely clear if there is a link between the lady and these animals.¹¹ It is possible that the rabi sissī ē, a native, breeds different kinds of equids and deals with their trade, so that his title would be a translation from an Anatolian reality in Akkadian. In the third millennium documentation, the “donkey sheperd” (SIPA ANŠE) is in charge of asses, half-asses and hybrids.¹²

The absence of the horse in the Kaniš archives matches neither with the discoveries of horse bones in different Anatolian sites of the same period, nor with the numerous representations of this animal in the iconography and pottery (cf. below 2.3). There can be two different hypothesis to explain this discrepancy between the texts and the archaeological material. The horse could be mentioned in our tablets by a special term of Anatolian origin, still not understood by the specialists. Preferably, it may not be documented in the Assyrian merchant archives because these traders were not interested by this expensive animal and did not include it within their commercial exchanges with local people.

2. The perdum, an hybrid

The lack of horses in the Old Assyrian tablets from Kaniš is compensated by the attested trade of hybrids. These are already well known during the third millennium B.C. in the Ancient Near East, both in the archaeological and textual documentations. The numerous words used, in the Ur III tablets at the end of the third millennium B.C. for example, denote various species of equids and their hybrids. Yet there is no real consensus for the translation of these terms.

Today, the crossbreeding of the donkey and the horse gives sterile hybrids: the mule which results of the mating of a donkey with a mare and the hinny which is the crossing of a horse with a jenny. Hinnies are less common than mules: just due to natural reasons the production of mules is much easier.¹³ Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the Ancient Near East may have first left their jennies roam and the crossing was done naturally with half-asses. Then, they decided to cross also asses with horses, the aim of the interbreeding being to produce some equids more robust that the donkey and more resistant that the horse.

The word perdum mentioned many times in the Old Assyrian documentation has been already identified as an equid hybrid, and translated by the generic term “mule”.¹⁴ This animal appears about thirty times in tablets, which document its trade and use.

2.1. The perdum trade

Most of the perdum references in the Kaniš archives insist on the high price of this animal traded inside Anatolia, about four times the price of a donkey: between 2 and 4 minas of silver (Kalley coll., C 1)¹⁵
The high value of this animal is confirmed by a merchant’s letter where we can read: “As to the *perdum*-mules that Adad-rabi led to me, they are of excellent quality… here they costed a lot! Sell them…” Sometimes merchants possess only half a mule.

The travel expenses for the *perdum* seem also more important than those for a donkey. In fact, between Wahšušana and Šaladuwar, two towns located near the Tüz gölü, the travel taxes, the fodder and the inn cost 1 mina 55 shekels of copper per ass plus 2 1/2 minas of copper for barley (AKT 3 34) while the expenses for one *perdum* bought in Šaladuwar and taken along to Wahšušana amount to 14 minas of copper only in Wahšušana, and the trader gives also 10 minas of copper for an escort who takes him and the animal to the bank of the river (Kt t/k 1 and 25). The renting of an escort indicates both the high value of the *perdum* and the travel difficulties in this area. Moreover, the crossing of the river is more or less expensive according to the accompanying animal. Leaving Wahšušana in the direction of Šaladuwar, it costs 20 shekels of copper per ass to cross the bridge. At another bridge at the exit of this second city, merchants have to pay 15 shekels of copper per ass. The tax for the bridge leaving Šaladuwar in the direction of Wahšušana is 2 1/2 minas of copper for a *perdum*.

According to our documentation which is partial and concerns above all Assyrians, the *perdum* trade seems mainly in the hands of these Assyrian merchants, very few Anatolians being involved. For example, Buzāzu, son of the famous Pūšu-kēn, sends some *perdum* to Puzur-Aššur from the region of the Tüz gölü in order to sell them in Kaniš. As a matter of fact, the Assyrian merchants act as intermediaries. They buy animals to the local authorities in Burušhattum, Wahšušana and Šaladuwar, along the Tüz gölü. They take them along to Kaniš or other Anatolian cities and sell them to local people. The *perdum* are to be sold before the winter, certainly because their housing and feeding during this season is more expensive. The Anatolians concerned by the *perdum* trade are mostly officials. Except the *rabi sīṣī‘ē* and his wife who could work for the Anatolian palace, the *alahhinnum*, a high official in charge of an administrative sector, deals *perdum* with the Assyrians. One *alahhinnum*, Hapula, is also known as the sheperd of the princess.

The *perdum* is often commercialized together with native iron, an expensive metal only found in small quantities. As for iron, its trade seems to be controled by the local authorities. Some merchants dealing with *perdum* could even be thrown into jail when they were going beyond their rights. The representatives of the Assyrian authorities in Anatolia are also involved in the trade of *perdum*, sometimes because they have to intervene with the Anatolian palace on behalf of the Assyrian traders.

2.2. Ridden animals

The question which arises from these remarks is which use was made of this very expensive animal often quoted individually? Many occurrences of the *perdum* equid refer only to its trade and its price, but in one letter, an Anatolian explains why he would like to get a *perdum*: “Give me that *perdum*. I have to go to *sikkatum*. I am your son, should I go on foot? Give it to me so that I can ride to *sikkatum* and so (uphold) your reputation… Now the prince is offering me no less than two officiels, that of *alahhinnum* and that of *šinahilum*, and I have promised the ruler a gift, a big one.” Whether the word *sikkatum* refers to a military expedition, a religious festival or a market for metals is not important here. The man asking for a *perdum* needs a mount diserving of his social status to join a public happening: he is an important personality since the prince himself proposes him some high functions. In another letter, we learn that *perdum* animals will be given after the return of a *sikkatum* expedition. They perhaps were also used for riding during the *sikkatum*.

Beside the *perdum*, the inhabitants of Kaniš seem to mount other animals. In fact the verb *rakābūm* which means “to ride” appears also with the donkey. People complaining about their lack of money write: “There is no money for my expenses, not even a donkey for me to ride!” or “What will I give to the children, what to give to my mother, what would I say for my food? Here, I have not even a donkey to ride!” Not having even an ass to ride is a synonym of poverty. There are also a few references of saddles for donkeys: *kussium ša emārim*.

But in these occurrences, the term ANŠE could also be used as a generic word for equids. The donkey is a very slow animal, going normally at a walk. When loaded, it usually does not exceed three kilometers per hour. Its step is quite rough and, for long distances, people can get ill on its back. On the contrary, the mule can amble, which is very agreeable. This animal trots and gallops with persons on its back: some mules are even faster that some horses. The mule is very easy to train and obeys to the voice. The general impression that we get from all these references is that poor people would have ridden donkeys while important persons would have prefered the mule *perdum*.
2.3. Archaeozoology and iconography of equids in Anatolia

The distinction between horse and ass bones is quite clear for specialists, even if the ass family form a more homogeneous group than the horse and the half-ass (hemione, also called onager) groups. On the contrary, the hybrid character of a skeleton is very difficult to prove and there are confusions between the bones of mules and hinneys because they are very similar. Only the size differ, the mule skeleton being larger. Moreover, the hybrids of the ancient Anatolia may be obtained by crossing donkey and horse or donkey and hemione. At the beginning of the second millennium B.C., as the horse is already well introduced in Anatolia, the *rabi sīšē* ("horse-master") would preferably rear hybrids of asses and horses.

Compared to the many sites excavated in Anatolia, archaeozoological studies on the material are still very few, especially for the beginning of the second millennium B.C. During the late eighth and early seventh millennium B.C., hemiones (*equus hemionus*) were hunted for consumption in the south east of Anatolia. As said before, domesticated horses (*equus caballus*) appear in Anatolia at the extreme end of the fourth millennium, and domesticated donkeys (*equus asinus*) are attested in Arslantepe and Hassek Höyük, near the Euphrates, at the same period. Some hybrids, called mules, were found East of Anatolia, in Korucutepe, a site covering the second half of the third and the beginning of the second millennium B.C.

The fauna of Boğazköy, Korucutepe and more recently of Acemhöyük, has been studied for the period covered by the written sources. The equid bones from these three places do not benefit of a representative quantity among the domesticated animals. For example, only 2.35 per cent of the bones from level III of Acemhöyük belong to equids. But in this site, the only animal bones analysed were found in the kitchen and stores of the palace and thus are to be connected with food. Among these, two groups were recognized: *equus asinus* and *equus caballus*. From Boğazköy and Korucutepe, scientists prove the existence of horses around 1.45 meter high at the withers, donkeys around 1 meter high, and mules inbetween.

On the contrary, the iconography of equids in Anatolia at the beginning of the second millennium B.C. is very abundant, most of the material coming from Kaniş, as the texts. But if the representations are numerous, most of the time it is quite impossible to identify unambiguously the different equids. Moreover, some symbolic representations even show imaginary creatures (*Fig. 1*). The main iconographic sources is the glyptic from Anatolia. Several sealings present animals drawing four- and two-wheelers. Most of these equids have been identified as horses with small ears on short heads, long necks and high-held tails. The two wheelers are draught by two animals, the vehicles with four wheels by four equids (*Fig. 2*). These Anatolian scenes – one of these seals belonging to an Anatolian official – have been interpreted as mythological. The person in the vehicle would represent a god. The chariot drawn by horses would then be used for cultual or military purpose. The draught is done by pole and yoke; the animals have a ring in the nostril to which the reins are attached. Ridden equids are very rare in the glyptic. There are only two very different samples, on which the species of the animal is uncertain (*Fig. 3*). The first one depicts an Anatolian procession in front of a deity; a man lightly clad rides bareback the equid which has been identified by different scholars both as an ass and as a horse. The second one shows a harnessed equid, carrying on his back a deity sitting sideways on a rigid saddle with a low backrest and a large footrest (*Fig. 4*). This animal has been determined as an onager (sic) or a horse, the last one being the most probable. A steatite mould found in Kaniş contains a representation of a woman or goddess facing a god astride on what could be a donkey or an hybrid (*Fig. 5*). The riders are always sited far back on the animal, on the rump, which is not the most...
convenient way for riding horses; the reins are still fixed to the nostril.

Other representations of equids are found on potteries, mostly horses (Fig. 6), fixed on the handles or near the mouth. The numerous samples present clear characteristics of horses, some being mounted by a rider. Only one could represent a donkey. The same style of horse was discovered on bronze terrets dated from the end of the third millennium B. C., the animal with halters being broken in.

The existence of the horse, absent of the Old Assyrian cuneiform tablets, is thus proved both by the archaeozoology and the iconography: most of the equid representations, when identified, show horses. In fact, one should not try to look for a link between the reality and the representations. In the texts the wheeled vehicles are mostly draught by oxen, and people ride mules and donkeys, while the iconography shows mostly horses as draught and ridden animals. One must keep in mind that the glyptic and stone moulds depict symbolic religious scenes. Moreover, all the decorated objects are produced in Anatolia. These people have domesticated the horse since more than a millennium and were, at that time, breeders of horses for Upper Mesopotamia. On the contrary, the texts are mostly written by Assyrians living in Anatolia for commercial purposes; they used donkeys to transport their goods, and appreciated the hybrids breded in Anatolia for riding.

3. The *perdum*-mule and other equids in the IIInd millennium

3.1. The mules from Mari

The *perdum*-mule is not yet attested in the Old Babylonian documentation, except once in the royal archives of Mari, dated to the 18th century B. C. A long unpublished poem narrates the accession of Zimrī-Lim to the throne. This epic was written at the beginning of the reign of the king. During a military campaign, Zimrī-Lim conducted the battle, mounted on a *perdum*-mule. Since the horse (ANŠE,KUR.RA or ANŠE *šimtu*) is well-known from this documentation, the Mari tablets give the proof that the *perdum* has to be distinguished from a horse. Some authors suggested that the *perdum* animal could be identified with the sumerogram ANŠE.LA.GU, which is usually translated as a donkey or a mule. The ANŠE.LA.GU occurs in texts from Mari and Chagar Bazar, a contemporaneous city, in lists of fodder expenses for equids. F. van Koppen recently proved that the ANŠE.LA.GU in these tablets corresponds actually to the akkadian word *agālu*, a donkey for riding. According to his study, the term ANŠE would mean ‘ass’ but also ‘equid’ in general, then the added qualificatives would refer both to the species of the animal and to its use. Thus the different terms used in Mari for asses and hybrids are:

- **ANŠE.LA.GU** = *agālu* = donkey for riding (and possibly also mule for riding)
- ANŠE-*par*-‘agal = mule for riding
- ANŠE.KUNGA = *parim* = ordinary term for mule (half-ass × donkey or horse × donkey)
- ANŠE.(GÍR).NUN.NA = *küdamum* = prestigious mule used for the royal chariot (horse × donkey).

According to a famous letter addressed to Zimrī-Lim, the royal chariot draught by high quality mules is the proper mean of transport for the victorious king of Mari contrary to horse riding. The various contexts in which the ANŠE.LA.GU appears in Mari refer to riding animals and to their saddle. Among these, one text listing oil quantities mentions some oil to anoint the saddle of an ANŠE.LA.GU when the king (Zimrī-Lim) left for Dēr. So, apart from showing himself on the royal chariot, the king would also mount asses or hybrids.

How to explain the present unique mention of a *perdum* among the numerous tablets found in the Mari palace? This word appears under Zimrī-Lim’s reign, in a literary text, and denotes a royal military mount. As it was already suggested, the new king of Mari could have known this animal while he was in exile near the Anatolian plateau. The scribe might have looked for a studied vocabulary and found a specific term to describe a prestigious mount. If we accept that the *küdamum* is a draught hybrid of a horse and an ass, the *perdum* could also be an hybrid of a horse and an ass but used for riding.

3.2. Occurences of the *perdum*-equid in the West (Ugarit and the Bible)

The *perdum*-mule is also attested later, during the 14th and 13th centuries B. C., in the archives found in Ugarit, on the Syrian coast. In fact, two tablets, written in alphabetic cuneiform, mention this animal among other expenses or commodities. In the first occurrence,
the mule (prd) is used as a mount by a messenger, in the second one, an amount of barley is given as fodder for mules (prdm). According to D. Pardee, who studied the equids mentioned in the Ugarit material, the numerous horses are used for military and religious purposes while the donkey represents the main beast of burden; the perdum, mentioned only once as a ridden animal might have been more commonly used that way.

Beside the Old Assyrian sources from Kaniš, the royal archives of Mari, in the beginning of the IInd millennium and the tablets from Ugarit, half a millennium later, the perdum animal occurs also in biblical Hebrew under the word pérêd (plural pfrād:m). In the Bible, this animal is usually ridden by persons of the royal family. When Abasom kills his brother Amnon, all the afraid princes run away on their mules (2 Samuel 13: 29), Abasom also rides on a mule when he flees after the defeat at Mahanayim (2 Samuel 18: 9). King David himself is the owner of a she-mule (pirdâdh); he asks priest and prophets to put his son Salomon on his she-mule and to crown him as king of Jerusalem (1 King 1: 33, 38 and 44). Later, we learn that Salomon receives as offering horses and mules (1 King 10: 25 and 2 Chronicles 9: 24). King Akhab owns also horses and mules (written in the collective singular: 1 King 18: 5). The mules occur among riding animals (horses and camels) and other means of transport like chariots (rēkōb) and litters (šāb) (Isaiah 66: 20); except the camel, these different ways of traveling remind the ones attested in the Mari sources.

The perdum occurs thus sometimes with other equids in the Bible. It appears in the trade with Tyre together with horses (sūm) and steeds (pārāś) (Ezekiel 2: 14). Back from the Exile at Babylon, after the total number of persons, the animals are counted: beside 6 720 donkeys (hâmôr), 736 horses and even 435 camels, the mules are the less numerous, amounting to only 245 heads (Ezra 2: 66). The same animals are mentioned together, threatened by a scourge (Zechariah 14: 15).

Thus, in the Bible the use of the mule-pérêd is very similar to that of the perdum or prd in the Mesopotamian sources: it is mostly a mount for important persons and kings, and it occurs only once as a burden beast, in a load of a pair of mules (2 Kings 5: 17).

3.3. The symbolic value of the equids

In a recent study on equids in the Mari material, B. Lafont showed that donkeys and mules have a high symbolic value in their different uses. Both are mounts for kings. There is a donkey feast which consists in a great ammrite ritual about the divine mount. The donkey foal is sacrificed in rituals of peace and alliance in case of diplomatic agreements. Furthermore, there is a special category of donkeys for sacrifice in Mari and Šubat-Enlil sources. These aspects are documented in many other places in Northern Mesopotamia. Moreover, archaeologists found some donkey burials in the same area. These different aspects may be connected together since U. Magen showed that the weather god was many times represented as a donkey rider and that the donkey festival in Aleppo and Emar was dedicated to this god.

On the contrary, the horse is considered as a prestigious foreign animal, that can be used for war, but which has no symbolic value.

The conclusions of B. Lafont have to be precised for the mule, whose use is different from that of the donkey. It is true that the inhabitants of ancient Mesopotamia may use the word ANŠE for both animals, but at least in one of the many occurrences of donkey foal sacrifices, the author of a letter addressed to the king of Mari precises that he killed a donkey foal, baby of a jenny, and not any goat nor dog as it was suggested to him.

This letter rules out the possibility to sacrify an hybrid, since the only one which could be born from a jenny, the hinnny, is quite difficult to obtain compared to the mule. Ritual sacrifices concern only the donkey foals, and only the donkey might be concerned by the festival.

According to the documentation, it is yet possible to determine the different uses made by the Mesopotamians of the equids known at the beginning of the IInd millennium B. C. The horse is mainly used as a draught animal on special occasions, and appears a few times as a mount. Since it is a foreign and expensive animal, the inhabitants of Northern Mesopotamia, in Mari or Aššur, might not yet be at ease on the back of this animal, sitting too much backward on the croup as shown by the iconography.

The word used for donkeys, ANŠE, is a generic term. But since the vocabulary for mules exists and is even diversified, most of the time these animals seem to be distinguished. Moreover, in Old Babylonian texts, beside the terms used for the species: donkey (ANŠE) and mule (ANŠE.KUNGA = parîm), one finds other words corresponding to specific uses made of the animals. The donkey may thus be used for carrying goods on its back (ANŠE ša bilîm), for pulling a chariot (ANŠE.GIR) or for riding (ANŠE.LA.GU = agalûm). The donkey as a mount is also mentioned under the expression ANŠE râkîhî. According to the same logic, words exist to distinguish the ordinary riding mule which might be an hybrid of a half-ass and a donkey (ANŠE-par′-agalî), the prestigious riding mule, an hybrid of a horse and a donkey (perdum) and the same type of hybrid used to draught the royal chariot (ANŠE.(GIR).NUN.NA = kūdamum). Both donkeys and mules are ridden by the lower and the upper classes of the population, but the mule is a better mount for long distances and military expeditions. The donkey has symbolic value.

For the Old Assyrian merchants, the vocabulary is much more simple. They import to Anatolia robust black donkeys from Aššur, which are able to carry heavy loads and persons, and which appear also as draught animals. It is the ordinary mount: each Assyrian in Anatolia may possess its own donkey, and not even having a donkey to ride is a synonym of a high degree of poverty. On the contrary, the mule, being an hybrid of a horse and a donkey, is a very expensive equid. As a more com-
fortable and much faster animal than the donkey, it is reserved to high officials and rich merchants for special occasions, like the *sikkatum* expedition. The use of this specific equid by noble persons for military purposes is confirmed by the Bible samples.

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2 For a recent historical synthesis on these documents, cf. Michel 2001a, especially 171–211.


5 The hemione has probably never been domesticated, but was used in the IIIrd millennium, being crossed to the donkey in order to create an hybrid breed; cf. Villa 1998, 47–48.


7 Eidem 1991, 131–134, see the letter L87–651.

8 Veenhof 1989, 521, n. 16. It exists also in onomastics, in the personal name Sisya, translated "Pferdchen" by Sturm 2000, 484, n. 16.

9 Farber 2001, 137–143.

10 The tablets concerned are A. 22181 published by Farber 2001, BIN 4 2 and CCE 6 22a translated in Michel 2001a, n°177.

11 Zarins 1986, 187–188.

12 Jennies are less fertile than mares and donkeys are more active than horses. Also the gestation period of a jenny is one month longer than that of a mare, which means that jennies don’t foal every year.


17 The tablet Kt n/k 1335, l. 16–17 mentions also 5 minas for several *perdum*, cf. Sever 1999, 93.


19 Text translated in Michel 2001a, n°148, l. 18.

20 Text translated in Michel 2001a, n°177.

21 The text BIN 4 172 is a commercial transaction concerning a mule, property of two persons; on half of the mule, there was a deficit of 13 minas of copper.

22 Cf. Dercksen 1996, 11–12. So it seems that taxes are much higher for the mule than for the ass, cf. Michel 2001b. But it is also possible that the price vary a lot from a bridge to another.

23 This small corpus is studied by Farber 2001. See the texts A. 22181, BIN 4 2 and CCE 6 22a, which is translated in Michel 2001a, n°177. It is possible that the damaged letter KTS 2 28 belongs to this dossier. It is written to Puzur-[*Aššur*] and concerns the *perdum* trade. Other Assyrian merchants are dealing with this peculiar trade: Ahu-waqa-and Št-Bēlum (VS 26 3), Adad-šulûû (CCT 3 32 = CCT 4 39b), Aššur-nīṣu and Aššur-Šamsī (TC 3 260).

24 Kt 93/k 299 is an unpublished tablet sent to Alāhum from Himnaya: “Sukkallum led my *perdum* beyond the moutain. He sold one, the other one is still unsold! I wrote to him saying: ‘Sell the *perdum* whatever the price and before the winter let your goods enter your money-lender’s house in Burushattum’ “.

25 Cf. CCE 6 46b which is edited in Michel 1991, n°212 and Kt n/k 35, 12–14 = Kt m/k 24, 12–14, cited by Bilgiç & Gündatti 1995, 86, n. 7. Hapualla, *alabihunnim* of the princess in these two tablets, is also shephered of the princess in ICK 1 13 edited by Michel 1991, n°102. The *kaššum*, a local official according to Veenhof 1996, 14, n. 33, is also involved in the *perdum* trade according to AKT 3 56.

26 Texts dealing both with the *perdum* animal and the *amūtim* or *asîn*–iron are Kt n/k 403 (= Dercksen 1996, 94, n. 294), Kt n/k 465, 8–9 and Kt n/k 472 8–12 (Bilgiç et al. 1990: 96–97), AKT 1 78 (= Michel 2001a, n°100) and also the tablets Prag I 443 and Prag I 822.

27 See for example the tablets Kt n/k 1637 (= Michel 2001a, n°95) where the prince retains a *perdum*, Kt n/k 755, AKT 1 78 (= Michel 2001a, n°100) or KTS 2 28.

28 Cf. the private letter Kt n/k 765 cited by Bayram 1998, 289.

29 The damaged letter KFP 3, cited by Larsen 1976, 252, n. 10, mentions the price in copper of a *perdum* of excellent quality, and KTK 3 translated by Michel 2001a, n°41.


32 Cf. KUG 41. See for example the remarks of van Lerbergh 1996, 113.

33 Cf. BIN 6 183 and BIN 6 73. Riding an equid during a travel is also attested in HUCA 39 28 edited by Ichisar 1981, 196, l. 17. Sugiyama 1999, n. 14, mentions the unpublished text Kt n/k 1052 which would refer to the *sikkatum* expedition (l. 19) and the riding of an equid (l. 20) which could be an ANŠE (l. 11), but it is impossible to know if these two activities are connected.

34 For the donkey saddles see Veenhof 1972, 6 and the tablets BIN 4 164, 30 = OIP 27 55, 19, CCT 2 18, 29, TC 2 61, 8 and TC 3 113, 18–19: *ku-tal-lu-tum la ku-si. za ma-at-ti-ih-si-im.*

35 Cf. Gayou-Carette 2000. Unfortunately, I could not get access to this manuscript. All the information I had about it was kindly given to me on the phone by the author.


37 Meadow 1986, 266–301.


41 Nicola & Glew 1999, 93–148.

42 Littauer & Crowell 1979, Kulakoglu 1999, 151 and Dupré 1993, 188. See for example Fig. 1 where two animals draw a chariot; these beasts have been interpreted by Özgüç 1965 as boars; but according to Littauer & Crowell they are just animals non familiar to the engraver.


44 Özgüç 1965, 67, identifies the person in the chariot with the Hittite god Pirva, attested in the texts few centuries later. The seal of Šatipra, GAL *hattim*, offers such a scene (ICK 1, pl. LXXI 46A, Tessier 221).
Matoušová 1984, 115–116 (fig. 83 where the animal is depicted as a donkey) and Dupré 1993, 174.


Emre 1971, pl. IX, 1 a–c, p. 108–109 and 145. According to Littauer & Crouwel 1979, 65 this illustration presents a formal iconographic device and is not relevant to the history of riding. See also Magen 2001, 252. The same animal could be found on a sealing from Külepe, Özgüç 1965, n°1 (fig. 5) and p. 67. The animal bears long ears, head and tail looking those of asses.

Özgüç 1965, 67, pl. XXXIII, n° 102; Dupré 1993, 97–98, n°163 would be the head of a donkey; Kulakoğlu 1999, 149–166.

Dupré 1993, 168 and 171.

The different kind of sources: texts, representations, bones… do not always converge and we can find as many bestiaries as disciplines: “Il peut y avoir des décalages importants entre les bestiaries élémentaires; un exemple classique est, en Préhistoire, le contraste entre la surabondance des restes du renne dans les campements magdaléniens et sa rareté dans l’art”, Poplin 2000, 498.

Durand 1998, 487.

This was suggested by Durand 1998, 487, and Lafont 2000, 221.

Cf. van Koppen 2002. This author proposes the equivalence ANŠE-pa-ar-a-ga-al = mule for riding. Note that Heimpel 1997: 61, translates also agálum by donkey, and ANŠE-pa-ar-a-ga-al by “mule-donkey”.

Cf. van Koppen 2002, 27. Perhaps some other small characteristics would also be taken in account as the colour of the animal, its size and its origin; see for example the letter sent by Išme-Dagan to his brother, king of Mari: “If the donkeys and dogs come really from the country of Andarig and Harbû, on the contrary, my jennies (EME, ANŠE) coming from the Upper country are small. Now, prepare and send to me 10 jennies from Sutu of good quality.” (Durand 1997: n°207, who read: “En revanche, mes juments, qui proviennent du Haut-Pays, sont petites de taille.”). Heimpel 1990, 602–603, proposes that the kudanum corresponds to an hybrid horse × donkey.

Charpin 1993, 169–170: «Tu es roi des Bédouins et en second lieu (seulement) roi d’Akkad. Que mon Seigneur ne monte pas de chevaux! Que ce soit sur une chaise portée par des mules seulement que mon Seigneur monte et qu’il honore sa tête royale.» The most recent translation of the text can be found in Durand 1998, n°732, and the correct interpretation of it in van Koppen 2002, 25, n. 39, who explains that kudanum is only used to draw chariot. The possible mention of a kudanum under the form ku-di-na in the Old Assyrian documentation (text Kt r/k 15, 4) proposed by Donbaz 1989, 79, has been later rejected by the same author, cf. Donbaz 1993, 145. He quotes the text Kt 89/k 369 where the word occurs again but is read: ku-ta- naam from kutinnam, “a textile”.

Lafont 2000, 212, n. 21.

FM III n°72, this text belongs to the beginning of Zimrî-Lim’s reign.

Durand 1998, 487.


Pardee 2000, 228 and n. 15, 16.

Veenhof 1989, 521 writes that perëd in the Bible “is a typically ‘noble’ riding animal” and quotes two references: 1 Kings 1:38 and prince Abshalom riding a mule in 2 Sam. 18:9.


See Magen 2001.


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