

“Thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns”

The Biblical Unicorn in Late Medieval Religious Interpretation

Abstract

This article investigates the ‘allegorical hunt of the unicorn’ in late medieval visual and narrative art. The existence of the unicorn in biblical lore is an important factor in how the unicorn has been integrated into Christian symbolism. By expanding the narrative connection between hunting, virginity, and taming provided by *Physiologus*, the allegorical interpretations turn the taming of the wild unicorn into signifying the incarnation of Christ. This influential interpretation enables an overlaying of allegorical meanings in various media. In this process, knowledge is organized into clusters of meaning in which the creature functions as a dynamic reservoir of knowledge. This perspective allows for a deeper understanding of the functions of animals (or more specifically, human-animal relations) in medieval Christian interpretation.

The Unicorn in Biblical Lore

We do not usually think of the unicorn as a ‘biblical creature,’ but it can indeed be found in Bible translations from Late Antiquity. These, as well as ancient zoological texts, were the sources for interpretation during the Middle Ages, and the mere existence of the unicorn in biblical lore is an important factor in how the unicorn has been integrated into Christian symbolism. Appearing as an elusive hybrid creature throughout time, the unicorn nonetheless avoided objectification through its (imagined) desire to associate with humans.

The focus on encounters and relations between humans and animals is significant with regard to how animals are perceived and interpreted in the Middle Ages. An especially influential aspect of the creation story is that it also reveals the origins of the relationship between humans and animals. The story of Paradise presents man and beast living peacefully side by side in a natural state, which ends with

the lapse. The fall from grace marks a *caesura*, after which peace is followed by the practices of hunting and domestication. In Christian medieval literature, there seems to be both a deep fascination with the loss of the natural state and a deep yearning for its return. It is also understood that the divide can no longer be recovered. This tension provides a background for the history of fascination with the unicorn.

While Rainer Maria Rilke called the unicorn “the animal that does not exist” (“das Tier, das es nicht giebt:” Rilke, “Die Sonette an Orpheus” 2.4, 273), during the Middle Ages, its existence was considered a zoological fact. In antiquity, natural history regarded it as a chimera that defied essentialistic description. According to Pliny The Elder, “the body resembles a horse, but in the head a stag, in the feet an elephant, and in the tail a boar” (“corpore equo similem, capite cervo, pedibus elephanto, cauda apro”). Despite its small size, it is considered to be “the fiercest animal” (“asperrimam autem feram monocerotem:” Pliny, *Natural History* 8.76, 56f.).

These ‘ancient’ qualities were complemented by several passages in the Old Testament that refer to a likewise ferocious beast called *re’em* with a powerful horn (for example, in Job 39.9 or in Psalm 22.21, which is quoted in the title of this article). Therefore, Jerome and other translators of the Bible never questioned whether or not the unicorn existed. Instead, they dealt with the philological question of whether *re’em* should be translated as *rhinoceros* or *monoceros* (Einhorn 48). This was resolved one way or the other (Wischnewsky 20), but there was never any doubt about the animal itself and its characteristics. This meant the unicorn was firmly placed within the overall scheme of creation. Its connotative characteristics also made it suitable for Christian allegorical interpretation. Yet, unlike a horse or dog, this *fera asperrima*, or exceptionally wild creature, provides no functional level for a relationship. The unicorn keeps its distance, with access possible only through hunting or taming.

The Unicorn in Christian Interpretation

The Christian interpretation focuses on the ‘hunt of the unicorn’ in a special and very exclusive way – with a lasting influence on perceptions of the unicorn. The influential narrative of the unicorn being

tamable only by a beautiful virgin is first found in the Greek *Physiologus* tradition:

The monoceras, that is, the unicorn, has this nature: he is a small animal like the kid, is exceedingly shrewd, and has one horn in the middle of his head. The hunter cannot approach him because he is extremely strong. How then do they hunt the beast? Hunters place a chaste virgin before him. He bounds forth into her lap and she warms and nourishes the animal and takes him into the palace of kings. (*Physiologus*, “On the unicorn” 51)

The *Physiologus* provides ancient zoological knowledge in a Christian interpretation, yet this narrative *might* go back to Indian mythology (Einhorn 35; Lavers 9f.). Unicorn here is the name of a man, son of a human and a gazelle with a single horn on his head, who is living as an ascetic in the forest. He is lured from his hermitage by a beautiful woman, and together their union brings rain to a drought-stricken land. If this fertility myth left any traces in the medieval versions of the unicorn narrative, they are hidden in the gender coding, in the encounter of male animal and virgin. Yet it seems futile to try to reconstruct exactly how the virgin enters into the story of the unicorn. We can see, however, how certain animal topics are transformed by interpretation within the Christian tradition. This is how the *Physiologus* participates in generating new knowledge – unicorn knowledge. By expanding the narrative connection between hunting, virginity and taming, the unicorn simultaneously becomes the object of an allegorical interpretation, in which the unicorn represents Christ, the enticing Virgin Mary, and the motif of taming signifies the incarnation of Christ.

The narrative correlation of unicorn and woman remains consistent throughout the Middle Ages and, thus, can itself become an object of interpretation. The influential interpretation as incarnation enables a layering of allegorical meanings in various media. In the process, unicorn knowledge is organized into clusters of meaning in which the creature functions as a kind of dynamic reservoir of knowledge. This is important for understanding the functionalizing of animals (or more specifically, human-animal relations) in medieval Christian interpretation. I will illustrate this by presenting an example of the pictorial subject usually referred to as ‘allegorical hunt of the unicorn’ (or simply: *hortus conclusus*) (Schiller 63; Burgs-

dorff 311). It is predicated on the above-mentioned narrative connection between hunting and taming and can be found in a variety of allegorical images.

The 'Allegorical Hunt of the Unicorn' in Textile Art

The subject is primarily found in German and Swiss textile art of the fifteen and sixteenth centuries (Rapp Buri und Stucky-Schürer 64; Vizkelety 592). Typically, it draws a connection between the allegorical hunt of the unicorn and the divine Annunciation. The subject associates hunter and virgin from the *Physiologus* tradition with the archangel Gabriel and Mary, which makes for an easy step from 'hunting' or 'taming' to 'conceiving.' This is shown by the image of the unicorn seeking shelter from the hunter in Mary's lap. The abstract nature of the Annunciation is set concretely in time and space at the very moment of impregnation. This is not just a visualization of the unicorn hunt, but through the animal image, the allegory also creatively lends material substance to the mystery of the incarnation (Manuwald 139).

A very detailed example is a large-scale tapestry (or *antependium*), dated 1480, which very likely was produced for the nunnery St. Agnes in Schaffhausen (Rapp Buri und Stucky-Schürer 205; Bartl 234; fig. 1).

On the left, the archangel Gabriel can be seen holding a hunting horn to his mouth with his left hand. His right hand holds a lance with a banner as well as four dogs on leashes. Their banners identify them as *veritas* ("truth"), *iustitia* ("righteousness"), *pax* ("peace") and *misericordia* ("mercy"), a common connotation for the dogs within this topic. The group stands before a low wall which encloses an elongated, six-sided garden. There are three towered entrances set in the wall, a fountain in the middle of the composition, and to its right is a spotted unicorn. It stands on its hind legs and leaps toward the seated Mary. She holds a book in her left hand, bows toward the unicorn and holds its long spiral horn in her right hand.

As we have seen before, the reference of the hunter to the archangel enables an association with the Annunciation. In this example, additional focus is drawn to Mary by the many references to virginity. There is clear reference to the Song of Songs with *hortus conclusus* ("enclosed garden") spelled out on the banner beneath the uni-

Figure 1. Hortus conclusus. Antependium (104 x 380 cm), 1480. Zürich, Landesmuseum, Inv. LM 1959.



corn. The garden wall has three gates: the *porta clausa*, the *porta ezechielis* and the *porta aurea*. The latter, the Golden Gate, makes reference to the encounter described in the *apocrypha* between Mary's parents, Anne and Joachim, after having conceived the holy virgin (Schiller 64). Further architectural elements include the Tower of David (up right) and the sealed fountain (*fons signatus*), which are both symbols for Mary in the Litany and in hymns. Further symbols of Mary appear as the *stella Jacob* (star of Bethlehem), the Ark of the Covenant, Aaron's rod, and Gideon's fleece (Unfer Lukoschik 76; Bartl 241).

While the subject may be conventional, the tapestry is exceptional in bringing together the references to Mary and the incarnation in a comprehensive interrelationship to the history of salvation. The dominant reference to the virgin conception is completely in line with the tradition of biblical interpretation. On the other hand, the unicorn – a novelty – is used as a typological reference to manifest the fall of man and his redemption through Christ's sacrifice (Rapp Buri und Stucky-Schürer 205). At the peak of the hunt, at the very moment of conception, this particular animal is not just tamed but also killed. The unicorn flees to the lap of the virgin, who holds it firmly by the horn. Simultaneously, Adam fatally lances the creature from above while Eve catches the flow of blood in a chalice from below. Banners near Adam and Eve display quotes from Isaiah about the connection between sacrificial death and redemption: “[p]se . aut . vulneratus . ē prup/ter . iniquitates . nostras” (“But he was wounded for our transgressions”) and “Et livore . eius . sanati . sumus” (“and with his stripe[s] we are healed” Isaiah 53,5).

This motif can probably be traced back to a German version of the *Gesta Romanorum* titled *Das ist der Römer Tat* (“These are the Romans' Deeds”) from the fourteenth century (Rapp Buri und Stucky-Schürer 64; Bartl 246).

Here, the unicorn is actually captured by two virgins:

Aber die iunchfrāw die daz swert trûg do die sach . daz es
entslaffen waz . in der schos irer gespiln . die slûg im sein
haubt ab . vnd tötet ez . die ander vieng sein plût . in daz pech.
Vnd von dem plût hiezz im der chûnich machen ein purpur.
(*Gesta Romanorum* 129)

The virgin with the sword cut off its head and killed it while

it slept in her companion's lap. And the other caught its blood in a basin from which the king requested purple dye to be made.

In this allegorical tale, the two virgins are interpreted as being Eve who kills the unicorn, and Mary who receives the blood. While, in this typology, Mary stands as an antitype to compensate for Eve's primordial sin, the Basel tapestry distinguishes Adam and his lethal spear. This provides a universal connection between the fall of man and Christ's sacrificial death, which enhances the incarnation symbolism (Bartl 244). As Henrike Manuwald has shown with reference to another, more diagrammatical textile representation of the subject, the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' is more than just an *accumulatio* of topics. The various interconnected fields call up associations which lend additional plasticity to the depiction (Manuwald 141, n. 61). In order to 'read' and understand this complex visualization – especially the aspect of self-sacrifice – one must know the history of unicorn interpretations; in other words, one must possess unicorn knowledge (Bartl 250).

In its weave of edification, allegory and narration, the tapestry offers varying modes of creating meaning which allude to religious reflection. The eye is led from left to right, more or less following a series of spiritual stations. These can be assimilated by reading the banner inscriptions in sequence, or by taking an imaginary walk through the garden. In the National Museum in Zurich, where the tapestry is exhibited today, you can take an audio-visual 'tour.' By illuminating individual parts of the tapestry, the presentation successively points out areas on the weaving that refer to the hunt, but which also represent the universal salvation drama of pursuit, deliverance and sacrificial death. In the center of the image, the sealed fountain stands for the virgin's constant and eternally unspoiled state. However, the visual axes draw focus to Mary and the unicorn. The dramatic, eye-catching figure is the spotted creature. The dynamic of the visualization is evoked by the Christian interpretation of a virgin who hunts and tames the animal. However, it is not the virgin who is penetrated by the unicorn, but the unicorn that is run through by Adam's lance.

At the juncture of knowledge, interpretation and narration, human-animal relations stimulate various associations. This process is connected to the system of Christian allegory, and yet seems to be more dynamic than the strict procedure following the four scriptur-

al senses that we commonly associate with it (cf. Freytag). Jens Pfeiffer has asserted that the process of Christian hermeneutics is not fixed to an already existing, pre-defined meaning (Pfeiffer). Instead, it is facilitated and modified by each new layer that is added to the original topic. Medieval fable commentaries provide different modes of allegory that indicate the manifold possibilities of interpretation that fable topics (and that is: mostly animals) cater to, thus producing new meaning (Wheatley).

The 'Allegorical Hunt of the Unicorn' in the *Beschlossen gart des Rosenkrantz Marie* (1505)

Regarding the unicorn, this can be shown by the example of an allegorical story from the late Middle Ages. In this case, the dense visualization of the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' that we have seen in the tapestry is transferred, or re-literalized, into a narrative structure. I will examine a chapter from the sixth book in the religious anthology *Beschlossen gart des Rosenkrantz Marie* (*The Enclosed Garden of Mary's Rosary*), which was published in 1505 by Ulrich Pinder in Nuremberg. It has been of particular interest to art history because of its over 600 woodcut images by, among others, Hans Schüfelein and Hans Baldung Grien (Vollmer). The collection was probably commissioned by the Fraternity of the Rosary to disseminate religious knowledge and techniques for the use of the rosary (Illing 829) – or as written in the book's foreword, instructions for "the daily commemoration of Mary's gift of virtue and grace" ("teglicher gedechtnus der tugent gab un[n] genad marie:" *Beschlossen gart*, f. i^{rb}). The specific context for usage may be found in private reading. By using the medial potential of both image *and* text, this book reconfigures unicorn knowledge in a specific way.

I will first describe the image of the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' that is used as a title woodcut for the chapter of Book 6 called "Von der menschwerdong gottes nach geistlicher auslegong der hystori von dem einhorn" ("On God's Incarnation According to the Religious Interpretation of the Story of the Unicorn"; fig. 2).

Compared to the meditative composition of the Basel tapestry, the dynamics here are striking. The entire hunting party is located within the walls, appearing to be frozen in their movements. The archangel's robe billows; the dogs leap toward the seated Mary. The unicorn itself appears to be the leader of this wild hunt rather than

Figure 2. *Der beschlossn gart des rosenkra[n]tz marie*, Nürnberg: Ulrich Pinder (1505). München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, ESlg/2 Pl. 1237-2, f. ix^v.



its harried prey. Its head is lowered like a charging bull with its sharp horn pointed directly at the virgin's lap. By comparison, the whole right side of the image seems still, beginning from the Ark of the Covenant, which dominates the center of the arrangement and, together with tower of David and the sealed fountain, forms a line of typological references that is leading to Mary. With her arms crossed, Mary patiently awaits the impregnation. The entire depiction is focused on the moment of conception. The excessive action of the unicorn seems to produce a surplus of meanings, which, unlike more traditional versions, radicalizes the embodiment and physicality of the subject. This incarnation has not been tamed, and this unicorn is not a victim.

Similar to this visualization, the following allegory makes use of existing information from natural science and the Christian interpretation, but it is applied in narrative form. The associative complex of themes for the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' has been transferred to the story (German: *hystori*) of a king whose first son has died, and whose second son is deathly ill. The unicorn is first mentioned in the advice given by doctors who have been called in from many different countries and

[...] beschlussen [...] einhelle[n]glichen disen rat dz disem
verwonten son kein andere erzney hiflich möchte sein/ dann
das plüt des einhorns / was das uber die wonden des kranken

gestrichen wird/ verhoffend gesond wird seiner tötliche krankheit [...]. (*Beschlossen gart*, f. ix^{vb})

unanimously concluded that the only medicine this poisoned son should receive / is unicorn blood. It is to be smeared on his wound / with the hope that his fatal condition will be healed.

This story has abandoned the earlier focus on the Virgin Mary (the reference is established within the context of the anthology). The hunting motif has been reconfigured in connection to the concept of healing through blood, similar to that suggested by the Isaiah quotes on the tapestry. Unicorn blood is also ascribed healing qualities in the previously mentioned *Das ist der Römer Tat*, but the discourse on the medicinal aspect actually extends as far back as antiquity (Einhorn 215).

Thus, the allegorical hunt of the unicorn refers to a new literal sense. In the following, the tale alternates between narrative and allegorical interpretation, in which the (allegorical) hunt of the unicorn appears as a prerequisite to the literal healing of the king's son. This presents a somewhat complicated reversal of the hermeneutic process, which causes the topic's status to swing between the significant and the signified. The association of incarnation to sacrificial death carried by the unicorn that we saw in the Basel antependium is also implicitly present here. The blood shed by the unicorn is (literally) medicine, but also serves as a symbolic remedy for sinful mankind. The following interpretation of the story identifies the first son as the fallen Lucifer (*Beschlossen gart*, f. x^{ra}). The son who has been poisoned is Adam, the father of humanity who can only be healed by unicorn blood.

While the visual examples use typological references to further establish the allegorical connection between Eve and Mary, the lapse, Christ's sacrificial death and the redemption of mankind, the allegorical narrative transfers these associations to an index of individual piety. Once the redemptional reference to the two sons has been determined, the participants in the hunting party are categorized according to their virtues. This time it is a whole group of virgins (that is: Mary's virtues) who lure the unicorn. Filling the role of the hunter are four greyhounds (*fier schnell hond*) as well as a little lead dog or flushing dog (*leythindlen, vulgariter stöberlin: Beschlossen gart*, f. ix^{vb}-x^{ra}). Here, further intertextual associations are at play since the

names of the greyhounds make reference to Bernhard's von Clairvaux parable of the four sisters' litigation (Bernhard von Clairvaux 115; Wischnewsky 33). The four sisters Mercy (*misericordia*) and Truth (*veritas*), Righteousness (*iustitia*) and Peace (*pax*) argue about how to deal with sinful mankind. A solution is provided by the incarnation of Christ and the salvation of humankind. Thus, the parable serves as a sort of preamble to the unicorn hunt to which God has sent the four virtues. They are shepherded by the little lead dog Love (*caritas*) who, "flushed out the unicorn and brought it to the greyhounds, who chased it further into the lap of the beautiful virgin" ("das da spyrend das einhorn aufftrybe von seiner stat / vn[n] brechte für die wind die eß dan fürter jagte in die schoß der schöne juncfrawe:" *Beschlossen gart*, f. x^{ra}). The arrangement of the hunt falls completely under *sensus moralis*. The hunt leads the virtue-dogs to Mary's virtues and flows into the conception scene:

Als bald nach dem vn[n] die juncfraw vonn der heilige
dryeinikeit außewelt ward / die jaghond bestellt mit sampt
dem leithindlin / vnd die vereinigong der vier wind gehoert
ward / Sant der förderlichost jeger / sez / d[er] heilig geist
auß seinen knecht / den engel Gabriel zu der junckfrawe die
da schön von leib / und noch schöner nach der sel was / dz sy
sich bereyten wer / mitsampt jeren juncfrawen vn[n] die
herzenlich begrüste sprechend / Ave Maria / Griest seyest
duß Maria / voller genad / d[er] her ist mit dir. (*Beschlossen
gart*, f. x^{va-b})

After the virgin had been chosen by the Holy Trinity, the
hunting dogs had arrived with the lead dog / and the four
greyhounds had been bound together / the foremost hunter
(that is: the Holy Ghost) sent out his servant /the angel
Gabriel to the beautiful virgin whose soul was even more
beautiful /so that she and her virgins should prepare /and he
sincerely greeted her, saying /Ave Maria / Hail Mary / full of
grace / the Lord is with you.

The hunt is not reinterpreted as the conception itself, but instead provides a prerequisite for it. What follows is a holy salvation drama including injury, healing and recovery (*vulneratio*, *medicacio* and *sanacio*) with a focus on unicorn blood. There can be no healing without unicorn blood; no unicorn without the Annunciation; and

no Annunciation without the preceding hunt. Therefore, at the end of the search, there is no allegorical interpretation of a *res propria*. Instead, both – the *res* itself and its significate – join together, “so that at this very moment the unicorn, the son of God, was caught” (“Dz also do zu der selbe stund gefangen ward das einhorn der son gotes:” *Beschlossen gart*, f. x^{vb}).

By identifying the different levels of allegorical meaning, I find it notable how new meaning is created in the process of layering various levels of interpretation. In the end, salvation is not an abstract reference gained by heaping layers upon layers of allegorical interpretation. Instead, the central event of Christ’s sacrifice is re-literalized in the healing of the poisoned prince, and thus made very concrete. We can also observe this procedure in the dogs. The four greyhounds are ‘biblical creatures’ too, but unlike the wild *re’em* creature, they only appear as abstract cardinal virtues in Psalm 84, which Bernhard refers to. Their canine materialization requires the unicorn – more specifically, the whole subject of the ‘allegorical hunt of the unicorn’.

Courtly Reinterpretations of the ‘Hunt of the Unicorn’

This article began by considering the questions: how are the intricate relationships between unicorn and woman, as well as hunt and virginity, symbolized and functionalized in various contexts? How are they enriched with new meaning? And to what degree is this tied to animals or the concepts of animality? Especially within religious contexts, it is apparent that we come back to creatureliness in order to evoke or at least suggest a sensual religious experience. The depiction always oscillates between the concrete and the abstract while adhering to clusters of meanings associated with each species. These do not necessarily refer to the animal itself but rather to specific configurations of human-animal relationships. Perhaps this explains why the religious identification of the unicorn as Christ is a prerequisite for enabling a reinterpretation within concepts of courtly love. The unicorn; the chimera – unicorn; the tamed beast – unicorn; the man, redeemer, and lover: in every variation, the narrative of the virgin, the unicorn and its taming remains stable.

When creatureliness, on the other hand, is linked to desire within the discourse on courtly love, the unicorn’s ambivalence appears on a different level than in the allegorical examples given above. By

emphasizing its purity, references to the unicorn in courtly literature also address the status of the virgin in the process of taming. In Wolfram's *Parzival*, Orgeluse compares her dead husband Cidegast to the unicorn ("der triuwe ein monizirus:" Wolfram von Eschenbach 613, 22; 541) and relates the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' to the motif of fidelity beyond death, when she calls upon the virgins to mourn the beloved animal that is sacrificed for purity ("daz tier die meite solten klagn: ez wirt durch reinekeit erslagn:" Wolfram von Eschenbach 613, 25–26; 541).

With this shift of focus to the role of the virgin the narrative permits an ironic distance within the discourse on courtly love, a discourse that issues continuous challenges and endangerments to purity. In Rudolfs von Ems *Weltchronik*, the taming of the unicorn is described as a test in which women who falsely claim to be virgins are killed – that is: penetrated – by the beast (Rudolf von Ems 1782–99; 25). Johann von Würzburg uses unicorn knowledge to criticize courtly love in his romance *Wilhelm von Österreich* (Einhorn 154–67). The protagonist's hunting master reports to the court that the track of a unicorn has been spotted. This puts the entire court in a state of frenzy and prompts them to set off in an attempt to lure the elusive creature with the help of a virgin. Thus, Johann von Würzburg adapts the religious subject of the 'allegorical hunt of the unicorn' for a courtly context. The printed edition from 1491 (fig. 3) even features an illustration that takes up motifs typical of the subject, but transfers them to the mundane setting of a *locus amoenus*.



Figure 3. *Historia. Wilhelm von Österreich. Wilhelm von Orléans.* Augsburg: Anton Sorg, 1491, f. 62r. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, GW12844.

However, the perspective on the hunt of the unicorn changes as well. The only person at court who remains unenthusiastic is Wilhelm's wife Aglaye, who warns her maid that this will all end badly:

Agly daz wiplich bilde
 hazzt das gejægde;
 si sprach zu der mægde:
 'du bist ein tōrinne.
 war hastu dine sinne
 getan? Wiltu ain tier dich
 lan ertōten daz sich
 niht verstat umm sache kain?
 und wærstu aller mægde rain,
 zwar, ez nimpt dir den lip.'
 (Johann von Würzburg v. 18886–95, 268)

The beautiful Aglaye hated the hunt. She spoke to her maid, 'You are a fool. Have you lost your senses? Will you let yourself be killed by a witless beast? And if you were the purest of virgins, it would surely take your life anyway.'

Aglaye's view on unicorn knowledge, as well as the narrator's, is both rational and ironic. Consequently, the creature is not captured. Instead, all the courtiers are diverted from the hunt by a charging horde of heathens. The original romance remains a fragment, so we don't know how the story ends. As the reclusive unicorn pulls even further away from us, all that remains are its tracks. These examples of courtly reinterpretations display a rather ironic treatment of unicorn knowledge and offer a hint as to why, much later, Rilke would have reason to describe the single-horned beast as "the animal that does not exist," that feeds by the mere "possibility of existing" ("Sie nährten es mit keinem Korn, nur immer mit der Möglichkeit, es sei:" Rilke, "Die Sonette an Orpheus" 2.4.753).

I have tried to show that these possibilities of existing, though imaginary, are not arbitrary or semantically indetermined. The unicorn's topical qualities have been formed by ancient knowledge, Biblical lore, and medieval allegorical interpretations that shape and lend associations to certain aspects. The process of creating meaning may be foreign to us, but specific symbolic concentrations prove to be surprisingly long-lasting, especially when they relate to the untamable unicorn.

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