

Georgian *naxiri* (cattle) - Akkadian *naxiru*

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**Abstract:** In the present article, an attempt is made to reveal a precise meaning of the word *naxiru* which, although referring to several animals, has not yet been defined. By analysing a number of arguments including the Georgian word *naxiri* (a herd) it is argued that this word in Assyrian sources denoted a sea cow.

**Key Words:** *naxiru*, *naxiri* (a herd), a sea cow, a seahorse, Assyrian sources.

1. Assyrian royal inscriptions at least since XII- XI cc. BC mention some sea animal referred to as *naxiru*. “I (Tiglathpileser I - C. L.) marched to Mount Lebanon. I cut down (and) carried off cedar beams for the Temple of the gods An and Adad. I continued to the land Amurru. I received tribute from the lands Byblos, Sidon, and Arad. I killed at the sea *naxiru*, which is called a sea-horse” [1, I, No 82]. Another inscription by the same king reads: “I made replicas in basalt of a *naxiru*, which is called a sea-horse <...>. I had killed (them) with harpoon of my own in the Great Sea of the land Amurru [Mediterranean Sea is meant - C. L.]. I stationed them on the right and left of my royal entrance” [1, No. 103]. The same sea animal is mentioned in other inscriptions of Tiglathpiliser I [1, No. 91, No. 132]. Later, in the IX c. BC, the same animal is referred to as a “sea creature”: “I made replicas of two n a x i r u, which are sea creatures, and stationed them at their doors”

[1, Ashur- Bel- Kala, No 250]; and more: “I marched to Mount Lebanon. I went up to the Great Sea. At that time I received the two *naxiru*, which are sea creatures” [1, Ashur- Nasir-Apli II, No. 597].

2. The identity of *naxiru* in Assyrian art up today remains unknown while Assyrian dictionary for *naxiru* gives not verisimilar and contradictory definition: 1. Smoll fish. 2. Whale [2, I: 137], yet the object of royal hunting could not be neither any little fish, nor the whale, which the king kills with harpoon in Mediterranean Sea (?), or receives as tribute. It can not be also a “sea horse” in modern interpretation (cf., [5]: “Sea horse- any fish of the genus Hippocampus, length 3 to 4 inch”). More appropriate to the “sea horse” of the inscriptions under discussion seems to be Greek mythological notion of the animal: “*Class. Myth.* a sea horse with two forefeet, and a body ending in the tail of a dolphin or fish”[5]. So, more likely *naxiru* in the Assyrian inscriptions of the XII–IXcc. BC means some real herbivorous sea animal - “*Manatee*, any of several herbivorous, gregarious sirenians... of West Indian, Floridian, and Gulf Coast waters, having two flippers in front and a spoon- shaped tail... length 8 to 13 ft.”[5]; or “*Dugong*, an herbivorous aquatic mammal of the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, having a fishlike body, flipper like forelimbs, and a rounded paddle like tail, length 9 ft.” [1]. In Russian biological nomenclature herbivorous sea animal of the same family is known as a “cow of Steller” (weighing 150-170 kg), after intensive hunting it disappeared in the coast waters of the Far East just in the XVIIIc.

3. On the other hand, Georgian *naxir- i* – “cattle” or more precisely – “herd of cows and bulls”[3] presupposes that Assyrian *naxiru* as “a sea creature”, “a sea horse” “or even a sea cattle”, “sea cow” in the inscriptions of the XII-IXcc. BC obviously is figurative, since Sumerian mythology knows “a god of cattle” - *la-har-u* [4, pp. 21-22]. Than Shumero-Akkad steam initially meant some animal like “cow, bull” or even both together – “cattle”. Such semantic reconstruction appears to be supported by the evidence

of some Ibero- Caucasian languages. Namely, Rutullian language in the East Caucasus has *nehir* – “herd of cows and bulls” and even more – *nehtshir* - “gadfly” or Lat. *Vespa vulgaris* or even *Hippobosca equinea* – insect stung the cattle.

4. If so, than the Georgian as well as east-Caucasian loan-word preserves an ancient semantics of the Shumero-Akkadian steam thus pointing out to the immediate language and cultural contacts of the Ibero-Caucasian languages with the ancient middle-Eastern universe earlier than the XIIc. BC.

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