

Kitap Eleştirisi



Рабаджиев, К., Конят, Колесницата и Конникът / Rabadjiev, K., **The Horse, the Chariot and the Horseman: On the Interpretation of Images in Thracian Culture**, St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, Sofia, 2014, 503 pages + plates.

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To anyone who is even superficially interested in the archaeology and ancient history of the Mediterranean, there are certain key concepts and/or images spontaneously associated with Thrace. The horse is one of them on account of numerous reasons: In the *Iliad* (13.4) Homer speaks of Thrace as “horse-breeding”; murals, silverware and other media convey images of chariots and horsemen; many finds depict a hero on horseback popularly known as the “Thracian Horseman”¹. K. Rabadjiev attacks numerous issues concerning the significance of the horse in Thrace through a meticulous compilation and comprehensive discussions of literary and archaeological material associated with the horse, the horseman, and the chariot/cart.

The book includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, captions, and visuals comprising illustrations as well as photographs. The text is in Bulgarian. A summary in English is provided at the end of the book.

In the Introduction K. Rabadjiev expresses his aim to “reconstruct the Thracian ideas about horses, chariots, and horsemen” (p.465) and that this aim entails not only a study of evidence directly pertaining to Thrace but also analyses and comparisons of artifacts and ideas presented by contemporary cultures like the Greek, Persian etc. The chronological boundaries are set within the first millennium B.C. The author goes on to describe the wide array of finds relating to the subject, emphasizing the need to understand the cultural attribution and ideological content for a correct interpretation of the artifacts. Methodologically each chapter is provided with a catalogue of literary sources and artifacts that tests and supports the discussions as well as the final synthesis.

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The first chapter examines vehicles drawn by horses, namely chariots and carts. The author begins by laying down the testimonia. In addition to the literary sources that start with familiar passages in the *Iliad*, a wide array of archaeological finds ranging from coins to reliefs, mural paintings, tableware, jewellery, models, and wagon burials are carefully cited. Discussions first focus on the uses of the chariot in war and races and of the cart (cf. Crouwel 2002). The author argues that the war chariots in Bronze Age Thrace are a poetic invention, associating the use of the chariot in the Bronze Age solely with ritual contexts. Later evidences concerning the chariot are interpreted as pointing to the impact of Greek culture, mainly via Greek apoikiai and imports. Then they emerge as a symbol of prestige in the fifth century B.C. with the Odrysian Kingdom. The iconographical analyses and discussions of its depictions in Thrace are based on the view point –profile, full face, and three-quarters. The chariot is also investigated as a sign symbol, belonging to the gods, to the king, and to the realm of death. The first chapter of the book concludes with a comprehensive discussion on the chariot/cart in the Thracian ideal world, which is manifested by religious and funerary practices. Regarding the latter, probable influences from Persian and Anatolian realms are emphasized.

¹ On the “Thracian Horseman”, see esp. Cermanovič-Kuzmanovič et al. 1992; Dimitrova 2002; Boteva 2011 (all with earlier bibliography).

The second chapter deals with the horse in the Thracian context, opening with a comprehensive citation of testimonia like the preceding chapter. This time the archaeological evidence includes coins, figurines, tombstones and burial chambers, vessels utilized in libation and dining, jewellery, and trappings alongside horse remains in funerary and ritual contexts. A subsection is devoted to the Thracian horse, where the breed and its domestication are explored. The horse in Thracian imagery and its roles as a gift, as a miraculous sign, as a sacrificial animal, and as a symbol of death² are handled in detail. The next issue of concern is the human factor beside the horse: the warrior, the hero, the groom, the tamer, and the context of a funeral feast. In the final subsection K. Rabadjiev evaluates the horse's position in Thrace, not only from the aspect of the objective world but also of the ideal. Particularly important is his discussion on the sacrifice and burial of the horse in the chamber tomb of its master (cf. Alexandrescu 1983; Carstens 2004; Kouzmanov 2005). In this context the author highlights the significance of the horse both as a political power symbol and as a mediator to the afterlife.

In the third chapter the focus is on the horseman. The literary and archaeological testimonia again take the first place. The latter consist of coins, reliefs, murals, vessels, jewellery, armour and matrices. The author pays particular attention to the formal dimension of the artifacts in relation to the gait and harness of the horse, the costume and equipment of the rider and makes important assessments on the image and status of the horseman in Thrace. The main classification of the horseman's representations on archaeological finds is based on the nature of the scene; hence battle, hunting (cf. Barringer 2001), miracle, and ritual scenes are examined separately. Classification develops further by differentiating diverse elements that take part in the scene. K. Rabadjiev discusses the horseman's manifold social roles as an elite warrior in the cavalry (Webber 2003), as a horse racer, as a deity, and as an agent of death with the help of his above analyses. He also considers the supernatural perspective, investigating the Thracian species, ancestor worship (cf. Antonaccio 1995), and anthropodaimonic character with regard to the Thracian Horseman.

In the Conclusion, K. Rabadjiev states that the significance attached to the horse in Thrace draws close to the status it enjoyed in the Persian and Scythian realms, rather than the Greek. The horse was man's companion in war, hunting, and racing. As a power and status symbol, it was incorporated into the aristocratic and heroic imagery. As a means of transportation, it came to be considered as a mediator that could take its master to the Beyond, bringing forth its appearance in funerary contexts and its chthonic character. According to K. Rabadjiev the latter attitude towards this animal is to be understood as definitely Thracian. The author also proposes that the mounted king once dead could be conceived as an anthropodaimon residing in the Beyond where he was transferred by his horse. This would pave the way for the "Thracian Horseman/Hero" of the Roman era.

² On this subject, also see Malten 1914.

In a comprehensive study like the present monograph, an index of proper names as well as some significant words and a map/maps of Thrace showing findplaces relevant to the text would have been much welcome. They could be useful in general but would facilitate international scholars even more. The photographs and illustrations are assembled at the end of each chapter.

K. Rabadjiev's monograph brings together an abundance of material on chariots, horses, and horsemen from Thrace, which is a major contribution. His discussions that include comparative data from neighboring cultures are very beneficial and offer valuable thoughts and proposals for scholars conducting research around the Mediterranean and Balkans.

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