
Origins of horse saddles: insights based on rock art examples from Philippi (Greece) and Jebel Rat (Morocco)

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Résumé

In what concerns the rock art of Philippi (Kavala, Greece) the present paper is the result of fieldwork where the author participated as researcher and member of the scientific committee of the Hellenic Rock Art Centre (HERAC) in 2005 and 2006 and as supervisor of a PhD thesis by a Greek archaeologist in 2010, in the frame of a different project, being, so far, the theme of these saddles still understudied.

Regarding the rock art from Jebel Rat (High Atlas, Morocco), this paper follows insights from the result of an iconographic analysis of the figures studied by the colleague Alessandra Bravin in the sequence of the elaboration of her recent PhD thesis, following also this author's arguments in what concerns chronological issues.

The rock art of Philippi is characterized by many representations of Iron Age warriors on horseback exhibiting weapons. In some cases it is also possible to observe what seems to be the representation of saddles with a diverse typology (semicircular, triangular and quadrangular). The author presents a *corpus* of the several examples of saddles discovered so far at Philippi and proposes a preliminary chronological approach based on crossed information from different sources. He also argues about the need of using structured saddles by archers in order to perform the so called Parthian-shot, which can be seen in diverse examples among the rock art figures from this region.

In a similar way with Philippi, the rock art of Jebel Rat has many representations of horse riders using weapons, existing also several examples of the depiction of saddles. However, most of the cases observed here are more schematic than at Philippi, consisting only in two vertical or short inclined lines, mentioned in the literature as "Roman saddle". However, in this region there also examples of saddles of a different typology, constituted by the representation of two arches which, according to Bravin's arguments, are earlier than the other mentioned cases.

The representation of saddles at Philippi and at Jebel Rat helps to clarify the problem of the origin of these devices, which literature has been attributing to a unique focus of origin – the Asian steppe during the 5th century BC. In the light of recent research based on

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the iconography of horse riders in the East Mediterranean, which appears on pottery dated from Late Bronze Age, it looks plausible that horse saddles had multiple focus of origin, in a similar way of the research regarding horse domestication, which recently has been discarding the idea of a unique focus of origin in Kazakhstan, and accepting the possibility of independent multiple origins.

Furthermore, archaeological evidence shows cases of possible early saddles in the Eastern Mediterranean, such as a clay model of a ridding woman from Cyprus, dated from the 14th /13th century BC, and a similar example from Archanes (Crete), dated from the 11th century BC, with both riders sitting on an unambiguous structure, being fundamental to consider these examples when establishing a chronology of horse saddles.

Mots-Clés: Philippi, Jebel Rat, rock art, structured saddle, origins.