



# An Ethnological flashback on Horse-rider cult in open air sanctuaries in Eastern Macedonia, Greece

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## ABSTRACT

*As demonstrated by results obtained during previous financed research projects (DRP, 1998-2000 and HRAD, 2004-2006) the rock engravings in the region of Philippi were probably carved by the Hedones, a Thracian tribe that occupied the region existing between the Strymon and Nestos rivers and between Mt. Pangaion and the Rodopi mountain chain. The archaeological evidence suggests a dynamic cultural and religious transformation process of an organized society in transition between Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age. Both archaeological expeditions were organized on an interdisciplinary research platform including not only rock art documentation but also landscape survey, ethnological investigation, pollen and vessel analysis. Special pilot projects are still going on, focusing on special petroglyphs as the horse-rider figure, which emerges as a standard regional feature, as it is present in all the open-air sanctuaries of Eastern Macedonia. A typological schedule is being made and an ethnological comparison research is in progress. This paper is presenting the preliminary state of the research.*

## RIASSUNTO

*Come dimostrano i risultati ottenuti nelle precedenti campagne di ricerca (DRP, 1998-2000 e HRAD, 2004-2006) le incisioni rupestri della regione di Philippi furono probabilmente realizzate dagli Hedones, una tribù della Tracia che occupava il territorio compreso tra i fiumi Strymon e Nestos e le catene montuose Pangaion e Rodopi. I ritrovamenti archeologici indicano che questa popolazione organizzata si trovasse in una fase di transizione culturale e religiosa dalla tarda età del Bronzo all'età del Ferro. Entrambe le spedizioni archeologiche furono caratterizzate da una cooperazione interdisciplinare che prevedeva la documentazione dell'arte rupestre, prospezioni sul territorio, ricerche etnologiche, analisi dei pollini e dei contenitori. Continuano ad essere portati avanti speciali progetti pilota rivolti allo studio di incisioni di cavalieri che presentano caratteri regionali standard come nei santuari in plain air della Macedonia dell'Est. È stata realizzata una tabella tipologica, mentre comparazioni etnologiche sono ancora in corso. L'articolo presenta lo stato preliminare della ricerca.*

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## GROUND

The rock art of Philippi was studied and presented to scholars in several single signed papers [Dimitriadis 1999b, 2000c, 2001c, 2004p, 2004g, 2005m, 2006n, 2006o]. Most of them were basically an overview on the research state [Dimitriadis 1997, 1999a, 2004m, 2004o] while the other explain the documentation, preservation and restoration action as well as the museum culture strategies of dissemination s undertaken in the last years [Dimitriadis 2000d, 2004p, 2006n, 2006o]. The present paper establishes the turning point of the future research program where thematic and interdisciplinary approaches are applied.

## 1. INTRODUCTION: DPR (1998-2000) & HRAD (2004-2006) CONCLUSIONS<sup>1</sup>

The fieldwork Phase I (DRP) was undertaken over three years (1998-2000), focussing on the areas of Prophet Elias and Mana. A survey of the area was carried out to record essential environmental data and signs of ancient anthropic activity. Mines galleries, for the extraction of iron mineral, were in use until the eighteenth century, and were probably already in use in antiquity. Surface cleaning was realized by using the 'neutral method' [Anati 1977] to determine the state of conservation of the engraved rocks. The engravings have been recorded by *frottage* technique (the pronounced roughness of the surfaces has caused

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unsatisfactory results) and tracing was made on PVC standard sheets (90 x 1.20cm). The techniques of engraving are recognised as 'hard pecking' at Prophet Elias and 'filiforme' at Mana. A preliminary conclusion was published in *Centro Camuno Studi Preistorici's Bulletin* (BCSP: 31/32).

Next step, Phase II (HRAD), was trying to verify the hypothesis proposed by Dimitriadis (1999) concerning the possibility that the Prophet Elias area was an open-air sanctuary of the Hedones. After having brought to light most of the known engraved rocks and completed the tracing on sheets of all the carved rocks more carvings were revealed. Such conclusions are going to implement Phase I risk and hazardous studies published in *ARKEOS*: 16.

### 1.1 NEW DISCOVERIES

Prophet Elias area: During the thorough cleaning and stratigraphic exploration of area B1, a pit-hole full of darkish terrain was excavated. In the laboratory Carmelo Prestipino (IISL) has determined the presence of charcoal in the terrain. Fragments of dark and red coarse ceramic vessels have been dated to the Late Bronze Age after optical examination carried out by Andrea Vianello (Oxford University). These conclusions agree with the evaluation of the rock art style presented by George Dimitriadis (HERAC). Fernando Coimbra (UAL) has discovered a new carving, labelled as the Philippi Horse [Figure 1]. It is a small horse, in naturalistic style, found during the opening of a new rock sector at Philippi/Prophet Helias Ö/B.2, and studied by George Dimitriadis. The mounted figures are also studied by George Iliades (UTAD).

Three new rocks at Mana locality (ÛÜá Ö/B.2, B.3, B.4-Eiv) have been discovered after Mr Stelios Foustopoulos recognised some engravings on a rock. Mana is located in a strategic position along old mountain passages that connect the small valley of Mesorema to the Plain of Philippi. Daniela Cardoso (Museum Martins Sarmiento-Portugal) is studying the geomorphology of rock ÛÜá Ö/B.1 so as to establish which kind of conservation work would be required in future. The ÛÜá Ö/B.1 panel contains quartzite inclusions, with clear signs of its removal around them. Rocks ÛÜá Ö/B.2, B.3 and B.4 have been only partially unearthed and sheet-tracing is therefore still in progress. The geomorphology of the rocky surfaces is quite different from the one of Prophet Elias area, and composed of grey marble and gneiss inclusions.

During the 2006 fieldwork season Andrea Vianello and Davide Delfino (IISL) attempted a photogrammetric and GIS survey of the rocks. GIS software packages were also used. A fixed frame (0.60 x 0.80m) was used as reference as it was impossible to use specialist equipment because of the uneven nature of the terrain. Particular care was taken to maintain the carvings under adequate natural light; the photographs were therefore taken in batches over a period of seven days. The resulting photographs will require substantial post-processing, and are intended to become in their own right a research tool and aids to experimentation and further study of the carvings in their original context.

### 1.2. OPEN QUESTIONS

With the conclusion of HRAD (2004-2006) mission different questions emerged. We mention the most critic ones: 1. It was necessary to ask for a deeper geomorphological analysis of the area. The presence of quartzite inclusions in the rocky surfaces of Philippi/Mana R.1 (Ö/ÛÜá B.1) and their strictly link with filiform scraps made by metallic pointer could be a nosey emerging scenario [cf. Figure 2]. Besides, the evidences of a pit hole, including remains of burned clay, nearby Philippi/Prophet Helias R.1 (Ö/Ïñ.Çěšád B.1) support our theory [Dimitriadis *et alii*. 2007]. 2. The discovery of new rocky surfaces along seasonal paths which links low fields with up lands and the hill picks enlarged our capacity to collect the "identity" of the landscape [Figure 3]. 3. the presence of a new naturalistic horse figure on Philippi/Prophet Helias R.2, external panel (Ö/Ïñ.Çěšád B.2 âüôãñéëüð ðñÝád) enriched thematic variants and complicated temporal frame [Figure 4].

## 2. A CONCISE HISTORY OF ETHNOARCHAEOLOGY IN GREECE

In Greece the first ethnographic attempt was undertaken by Casson (1938) in order to reconstruct the modern commercial web in Aegean Sea. By the study of the commercial status in Greece during the first decade of the XX century and its comparison with the EBA and Classic times he concludes that the differences are still minimum. To support his thesis he presents as justification the itinerant system of vessels' merchant established in Cyprus, Chalkida, Same, Skyros, Corfù and Chanak-Kale. During 70s Matson (1972) proposed an historical approach to vessels craft productions in a small group of villages: Vounaria, Komvi and Petriade in Peloponnesus in Southern Greece. In the specific he studied the techniques used for the realization of the traditional handmade vessels and compared them with the unearth pottery collected

during the archaeological excavations in the area. Unfortunately in spite of his good proposals he couldn't be able to give a synthesis of the research.

The approach of Warren in 1978 was adherent to formalism: it presented the resemblance between "pilgrim flasks", in order that his reports, that are manufactured in the Thrakapso and certain similar Cretan vessels that are dated in copper age. This comparative method, particularly promoted also from the Greek experts, does not prove cultural continuity, after such simple forms are found in other cultures. "Pilgrim flasks" are also manufactured by artisans of Djerba in Northern Africa [Betancourt 1984]. More recently, ethnographic descriptions of M. Vojatzoglou and X. Blitzer (1984) with regard to the ceramic production in the Thrapsano and the Kentri of Crete respectively, were used by the Betancourt for the interpretation of Minoan ceramics. Economic, social and professional status of the artisan could be expressed in any moment of his production. Betancourt, however, recognizes that dangers are included in ethno archaeology behaviour and he stresses the importance of studying the technological aspects of ceramic production in order to obtain solid conclusions for the past.

The work of X. Blitzer (1990) for the pastoral life in the mountains of Crete is important as for that it does not deal only with the production of ceramics, but the authors tries to adapt that functions to the environment. He deals with functional, economic and negative behaviour of ceramics in the present extensively, and transposes them to the past. By this way he puts ceramics in their real dimension: they do not constitute simply the products of concrete laboratory with concrete decoration, or still the containers of big scale trade, but are anymore daily used by persons in a concrete way and can provide precious information on the archaeological interpretation. Moreover, it moved in a direction that allows to avoid the study of ceramic (but also the society, as direct consequence) as something static and immutable during the time. It re-defined historical parallels with regard to the production and the trade of messinian ceramics, underlining the simultaneous continuity in the regional deliveries of ceramic. Such methodology helps him to avoid methodological errors inherent to the studies of Greek ceramic, carried on by Greek or international experts: the present is connected directly to the classic antiquity, forgetting the existence of Byzantine empire or Ottoman possession in between.

Besides London (1991) in her study on the Cypriot ceramics follows an environmental direct method. She locates sources of clay throughout the analysis of manufacture techniques to decide if a concrete ceramic category had one or a lot of production points, and to give information concerning the economic relations (trade). Another sector that is profited by ethnographic study is the one that concerns the system of classification. In the same study London showed that the knowledge of ceramic technology that is based on ethnographic study can help archaeologists to categorize the ceramics without adopt evaluative positions, as entire vessels or even splinters can present correlations between artefacts and persons.

### **3. STUDY CASE: HORSEMEN ROCK ART FIGURE AT PHILIPPI.**

A preliminary attempt to study horsemen figure was undertaken with the conclusion of Phase I whose partial target was to classify such figures and establish an hypothetical timeline of the stylistic evolution. [cf. Table I]. Single figures (*circa* 33) were counted and statistic evaluations made: horsemen are only the 11 per cent (11.15%). If the quantitative data are too low how can we discuss it in an qualitative perspective? How adherent are such data to the preliminary hypothesis?

Few open questions were host during Phase II correlated with landscape survey and ethnological data collected in the area [cf. Chapter 3.1]. The predominance of the horse rider figure was due to the metals fever: the unearth power is equal to the horse rider heroic figure in an open air landscape modelled since the first attestation of the metallurgy in the area (c. 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BP; Sherratt 1986: 435-437] and the cultural atmosphere enlarged up to Afghanistan uplands [Doumas 1994: 29) which was the principal metal provider (block tin and lapis lazuli) for the North Aegean area [Pernicka et alii 1990: 290].

#### **3.1. BRIEF EXPOSITION OF ETHNO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL MATERIAL\***

According to the Greek mythology, the eighth command that gave Eurystheas to Hercules was to bring him lively the horses of Diomides. Diomides was Mars and Kyrinis' son and reigned on a wild and warrior population called Vistones that lived in Thrace. The Vistones took their name from the lake around which their lived, the Vistonice Lake. Diomides had four irrationally strange female horses, famous for their ferocity: Podagros, Shining, Blond and Terrible. These horses ate hay, grass and human flesh. When foreigners reached in the kingdom of Diomides, this one killed them and threw their pieces in the cupreous crib of horses. Also his servants were victim of his ferocity when he wanted to punish them. The fable informs us that the ferocity of horses was emanated from the water that they drunk in the Kossinity River



that poured from Lake Vistonice. Hercules accomplished his task seized the horses and killed Diomides. However, as price of this he lost his good friend and hero Avdiro, which was eaten by the horses. To perpetuate Avdiros memory Hercules found the Thracian ancient city of Avdira.

We meet a similar fable with wild horses also in another Thracian race called Hedones, race that lived in the estuaries of Strimonas at the edge of the Nestos valley. Lykourgos, the king of Hedones opposed in the adoration of Dionysus, attacked the Vakhes and threatened the life of their God. Dionysus in order to revenge him lost his reason and his child, believing to have been pruned a vine. Then Hedones tied him up above in their mountain Panghaio, where was eaten by wild horses.














The description of horses and their placement in the areas delimited geographically around Thrace region is significant. Outstanding of fabulous time and place frames, "Horse" figure were imported in Thrace between 8<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> century b. C. probably from the Siberian steppes [Powel 1971] as an early use of horse in fight actions.

In the Byzantine years the iconographic nomenclature of Thracian horseman engaged Christian characteristics. The most frequent pattern is horseman/snake (=dragon)/tree that carries out an underworld symbolism [Figure 5]. Indeed, Thracian horsemen were identified along the centuries with Saint George and such combination perpetuates in all Balkan area. Characteristic is the example that is present in Saint George open air church in Zavernovo in Bulgaria where residents identify a column with the Thrace-Horseman as the representation of Saint George [Figure 6] which is reported as "saint warrior" in the intellectual army of Christ [Walter 1987]. we meet similar reports also in the Agathoupoli village in Eastern Thrace.

(FOOTNOTES)

<sup>1</sup> Full draft is hosted in <http://www.antiquity.ac.uk/ProjGall/311.html>

\* Schedule prepared by George Iliades.

|                           | πρ. Ηλίας<br>Φ/ B.1   | πρ. Ηλίας<br>Φ/ B.2   | πρ. Ηλίας<br>Φ/ B.2   | πρ. Ηλίας<br>Φ/ B.3   | πρ. Ηλίας<br>Φ/ B.3   | πρ. Ηλίας<br>Φ/ B.3   |
|---------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>A:<br/>LBA-I</b>       |                          |   |   |  |                               |  |
| <b>B:<br/>LBA-II</b>      | (transition to Iron)<br> |   | (transition to Iron)<br> |   |                               |   |
| <b>C:<br/>EIA</b>         |   |  |   |  | (transition to Byzantine)<br> |   |
| <b>D:<br/>ByzA</b>        |   |  |   |   |                              |   |
| <b>E:<br/>18th<br/>c.</b> |   |  |   |   |   |   |

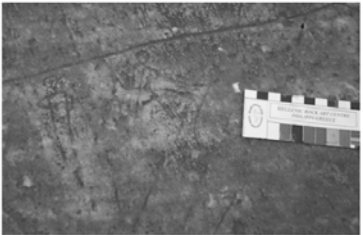
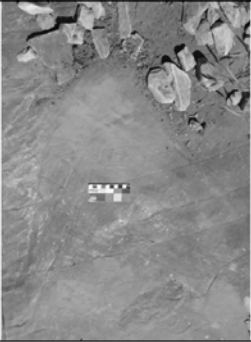

|                           | <b>Μάνα Φ/Β.1</b>  | <b>Μάνα Φ/Β.2</b> | <b>Μάνα Φ/Β.3</b>   |
|---------------------------|--|-------------------|---|
| <b>A:<br/>LBA-<br/>I</b>  |  |                   |   |
| <b>B:<br/>LBA-<br/>II</b> |  |                   | (transition to Iron)<br> |
| <b>C:<br/>EIA</b>         |  |                   |   |
| <b>D:<br/>ByzA</b>        |  |                   |                        |
| <b>E:<br/>18th<br/>c.</b> |  |                   |   |

Table I. A tentative typological & chronological schedule. Figures coming from the sites of Prophet Helias and Mana at Philippi. Acknowledge to Prof. Dr. Wilfried Menghin, Director of Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, Berlin which discuss with me some date problems relative horse-riders figures and specialist on “conus” artefact. Photo & Tracing: G. Dimitriadis. © HERAC.



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6

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