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THE SIGNIFICANCE AND SYMBOLISM OF EQUESTRIAN ICONOGRAPHY AND  
HORSES ON SOME SELECTED GRECO-ROMAN COINAGE: ANALYTICAL  
STUDY OF POLITICAL DOMINANCE AND RELIGIOUS PROPAGANDA

<sup>\*1</sup> Ahmed Mashhout Keshka- *Lecturer in the Department of Egyptology - Faculty of Archaeology- Fayoum University- Egypt.*

**ABSTRACT**

*The theme of this research paper seeks to demonstrate the significance and symbolism of equestrian iconography and horses in light of some selected Greco-Roman coinage from the perspective of analytical study of political dominance and religious propaganda. This paper presents analytical study and aims to publish five previously unpublished coins, currently preserved in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. The study provides a comprehensive examination and analytical overview of their engraving techniques and the nature of its iconic patterns or the so-called iconographic styles, aiming to uncover how political leaders employed these coins as tools of political dominance and propaganda in Egypt during the Greco-Roman periods, this is from the perspective that they are tools and semantic symbols for personal use and self-presentation. Coins provided a unique medium through which political messages could be subtly and effectively disseminated. In light of artistic brilliance and technical skill, political and social themes have been almost literally imprinted on the minds of users and the target audience. Coins offer valuable insight into the communication strategies of Greco-Roman elites and illuminate underlying social sentiments and behaviors. In light of this, the significance and symbolism of these coins should be interpreted according to the cultural and social context, geographical location, and historical period in which they were produced.*

**ملخص**

يسعى موضوع هذه الورقة البحثية إلى تبيان أهمية ورمزية أيقونات الفروسية والخيول في ضوء بعض العملات اليونانية-الرومانية المختارة، وذلك من منظور دراسة تحليلية للهيمنة السياسية والدعاية الدينية، كما يهدف لإجراء دراسة تحليلية ونشر علمي لخمس عملات معدنية لم تُنشر سابقاً، وهي محفوظة حالياً في المتحف المصري بالقاهرة. تُقدم الدراسة مفاد تحليلية لتقنيات نقشها وماهية أنماطها الأيقونية بهدف إمالة اللثام عن كيفية استخدام القادة السياسيين لتلك العملات كونها بمثابة أدوات للهيمنة والدعاية السياسية في مصر خلال العصرين اليوناني والروماني، وذلك من منظور الإعتقاد بكونها أدوات ورموز دلالية للاستخدام الشخصي، بحيث وفرت العملات المعدنية وسيلةً فريدةً لنشر الرسائل والمفادات السياسية بمهارةٍ وفعاليةٍ. في ضوء براعة فنية ومهارة تقنية، فقد انطبعت الموضوعات السياسية والاجتماعية بشكلٍ حرفيٍ تقريباً في أذهان المستخدمين والجمهور المُستهدف. تُقدم تلك العملات المعدنية رؤيةً قيمةً حول استراتيجيات التواصل التي اتبعتها طائفة النخبة اليونانية والرومانية، كما تُلقي الضوء على السلوكيات الاجتماعية السائدة. في ضوء ذلك فيجدر تفسير الأهمية والرمزية لتلك العملات تبعاً للسياق الثقافي والاجتماعي، والموقع الجغرافي، والفترة التاريخية التي أنتجت فيها.

**KEYWORDS**

*Equestrian Iconographies and Horses; Greco-Roman Coinage; Political Dominance; Religious Propaganda; Egyptian Museum in Cairo.*

**كلمات دلالية (مفتاحية)**

*أيقونات الفروسية والخيول؛ العملات اليونانية-الرومانية؛ الهيمنة السياسية؛ الدعاية الدينية؛ المتحف المصري بالقاهرة.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The depiction of living beings was a prominent feature in the artistic traditions of ancient civilizations, particularly in those of Egypt, Greece, and Rome. This interest was expressed across a range of artistic media, including sculpture, relief, painting, and notably, coinage. Greek and Roman coins especially those from the Roman Alexandrian series played a central role in this visual culture. These coins often featured representations of deities, mythological scenes, and living creatures, serving not only as currency but also as tools of political propaganda through which rulers communicated their power, virtues, and ideologies to a broad audience. In light of the symbolic importance of such imagery, this study focuses on the publication and analysis of a group of previously unpublished coins housed in the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Many of these coins display vivid depictions of living beings either independently or alongside divine figures imbued with symbolic meanings related to themes such as war, peace, hope, virtue, development, and authority. These representations offer valuable insights into the values, beliefs, and sociopolitical dynamics of the ancient world. Horses and Equestrian Iconography in the ancient world were closely linked to a range of functions and symbolic roles, including military, religious, and mythological associations.

Their significance varied across civilizations. In the Greek period, they were connected to nature deities, particularly the goddess of vegetation, and were seen as symbols of fertility and life. They were also associated with water sources and springs—vital elements of life in the ancient worldview. It was believed that horses had the power to locate or even unleash freshwater springs, and legends claimed that the strike of a horse's hoof could cause water to gush from the earth. This idea was closely tied to the god Poseidon, who was not only the god of the sea but also the master of many legendary horses, reinforcing the deep symbolic connection between horses, water, and divine power in Greek mythology.<sup>1</sup> He bore the epithet Hippios (ἵππιος), meaning "of horses." According to myth, he could assume the form of a horse, and he was believed to be the creator of horses themselves.<sup>2</sup>

Immortal horses were often associated with the gods in Greek mythology. One example is Hippii Athanatoi (ἵπποι ἄθᾶνατοι), or "immortal horses," which were linked to divine beings. Among them were the four wind gods; Euros (god of the east wind), Boreas (god of the north wind), Zephyros (god of the west

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<sup>1</sup>Milicevic-Bradac, M., Greek mythological horses and the world's boundary, *Opuscvla archaeological* 27.1, 2003, pp. 379- 380.

<sup>2</sup>Komita, N., Poseidon the horse god and the early indo-Europeans, 1985, p. 31.

wind), and Notos (god of the south wind) who were said to take the form of horses and pull Zeus's celestial chariot through the skies.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. DISCUSSION, METHODOLOGY AND CONTEXT

### - COIN NO. 1<sup>2</sup>

- **Registration Number:** 130

- **Metal:** Gold

- **Category:** Aureus

- **Period:** Emperor Commodus, Roman

- **Approximate Date :** 177-178AD<sup>3</sup>

### - **Description**

**1- Obverse:** a half-length portrait of Emperor Lucius Aurelius Commodus Augustus, facing right and crowned with a laurel wreath. The surrounding Latin inscription reads: **L(ucius) AVREL(ius) COMMODVS AVG(ustus)** — *Lucius Aurelius Commodus Augustus*.

**2- Reverse:** A standing male figure possibly a custodian or official—holding a long scepter. Beside him stands a horse raising its right foreleg, suggesting movement or alertness. The Latin inscription encircling the scene reads: **TRP III IMP II COS PP**, indicating that Commodus held tribunician power<sup>4</sup> for the third time, had been acclaimed imperator (military commander) twice, served as consul, and was honored with the title Pater Patriae (Father of the Fatherland).

- **Analytical notes:** This coin was struck in Rome around 177–178 AD during the reign of Emperor Marcus Aurelius. It was issued in honor of his son, Commodus, upon his elevation to the position of co-emperor. The reverse features a figure identified as Custer, chosen to symbolize authority or divine endorsement of the new status. This depiction reflects the political and ceremonial significance of Commodus's rise to power.<sup>5</sup>



<sup>1</sup>) <https://www.theoi.com/Ther/Hippii.html#Family> 14/5/2023

<sup>2</sup>) RIC 648 Aurelius; sear 5611; Cohen 760; BMC 774.

<sup>3</sup>) [https://numismatics.org/search/results?q=denomination\\_facet%3A%22Aureus%22+AND+material\\_facet%3A%22Gold%22+AND+portrait\\_facet%3A%22Commodus%22+AND+deity\\_facet%3A%22Castor%22+AND+imagesavailable%3Atrue+AND+department\\_facet%3A%22Roman%22&lang=en](https://numismatics.org/search/results?q=denomination_facet%3A%22Aureus%22+AND+material_facet%3A%22Gold%22+AND+portrait_facet%3A%22Commodus%22+AND+deity_facet%3A%22Castor%22+AND+imagesavailable%3Atrue+AND+department_facet%3A%22Roman%22&lang=en) 15/5/2023; RIC III, Marcus Aurelius, 648.

<sup>4</sup>) Tribunitia Potestas : Educational authority: that is, the power granted to the emperor as a defender of the rights and interests of the public.

Stevenson, S.W., A Dictionary of Roman Coins, s.v. *Tribunitia Potestas*; <http://www.forumancientcoins.com/numiswiki/view.asp?key=TRI%20POT>

<sup>5</sup>) Arnoy, I., The literary character of the Roman emperor Commodus, MA Thesis, Nord University 2022, 28.

Castor was one of the twin brothers known collectively as the Dioscuri, a title given to Castor and Pollux, the sons of Leda, queen of Sparta and wife of Tyndareus. According to myth, Zeus was enamored with Leda and approached her in the form of a swan. She later gave birth to the twins, but their parentage differed: Castor was the mortal son of Tyndareus, while Pollux was the immortal son of Zeus. Despite this divine disparity, their bond remained inseparable. Castor was celebrated for his skill in horsemanship, while Pollux excelled in boxing. Together, they participated in several heroic adventures, most notably aboard the Argo, where they aided Jason in his quest for the Golden Fleece and rescued sailors in peril. During one of these conflicts, Castor was mortally wounded. Grief-stricken, Pollux implored his father Zeus to allow him to share his immortality with his brother. Zeus granted the request, permitting the twins to alternate their existence—spending one day on Mount Olympus and one day in the underworld. Their fraternal devotion became a symbol of loyalty and was immortalized in the night sky as the constellation Gemini.<sup>1</sup>

The Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, were closely associated with horses in Greek and Roman mythology. They were gifted four divine horses—Kyllaros and Xanthos from the goddess Hera, and Phlogeus and Harpagos from the god Hermes. These steeds were used by the twins during chariot races, notably in the funeral games held in honor of Bellias.<sup>2</sup>

Castor (often referred to as Custer in Romanized renderings) was depicted on a multi-denomination coin issued during the reign of Emperor Commodus due to his renowned equestrian skills and pivotal role alongside his brother Pollux. In Greek mythology, Castor was known for intervening during times of crisis—paralleling the role that Commodus claimed for himself during the joint rule with his father, Marcus Aurelius. Commodus, who participated in wars alongside Marcus Aurelius, was portrayed as a problem-solver and restorer of order within the empire.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>) Gartrell, A., *The cult of Castor and Pollux in ancient Rome: myth, ritual, and society*, Cambridge University press 2021, pp. 6-7.

<sup>2</sup>) <https://www.theoi.com/Ther/HippoiDioskourioi.html> 14/5/2023

<sup>3</sup>) Arnoy, I., *The literary character of the Roman emperor Commodus*, p. 28.

**- COIN NO. 2****- Registration Number: 420****- Metal: Bronze****- Category: Follis****- Period: Emperor Maxentius, late Roman****- Approximate Date: 309-312 AD <sup>1</sup>****- Description****1- Obverse:** Bust of Emperor Maxentius facing right, laureate.

Inscription: IMP C MAXENTIVS P F AVG (Imperator Gaius Maxentius, Pius, Felix, Augustus).

**2- Reverse:** The Dioscuri, Castor and Pollux, are depicted standing opposite one another, each holding a long scepter, with two rearing horses between them. Inscription: AETERNITAS AVG N (Eternity of Our Augustus). In the exergue: M OST Q (Minted at Ostia, Fourth Workshop).**- Analytical notes:** The Ostia mint issued a bronze coin under Emperor Maxentius that prominently featured the Dioscuri—Castor and Pollux on the reverse. In some variants, the twins are accompanied by the she-wolf and Romulus and Remus, iconic figures closely tied to Rome's mythic origins. Maxentius deliberately selected these symbols due to their longstanding association with the foundation and divine protection of the city. By invoking the Dioscuri, he presented himself as a ruler aligned with cosmic and civic order, suggesting that his authority was sanctioned by forces safeguarding Rome's eternal destiny. This symbolic program was particularly resonant in the aftermath of his successful reclamation of Rome, a moment he leveraged to promote his image as the city's rightful and invincible guardian. Through such iconography—including depictions of Castor, Pollux, the she-wolf, and the twins—Maxentius fashioned a narrative of legitimacy rooted in Roman tradition and divine favor. Despite his efforts to assert control and project strength—successfully defending Rome against several of Constantine the Great's early advances—his reign ended in 312 CE when he was decisively defeated at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge.<sup>2</sup>

Maxentius undertook extensive architectural and urban renewal projects in Rome, seeking to reinforce both the city's infrastructure and his own legitimacy as its protector. Among his most notable efforts were the restoration of the

<sup>1</sup>) RIC VI Ostia 35.<sup>2</sup>) Kristensen, T.M., *Maxentius' head and the rituals of civil war, civil war in ancient Greece and Rome, contexts of disintegration and reintegration*, Stuttgart 2016, pp. 323- 324.

Temple of Venus, the construction of the monumental *Basilica Nova*, one of the largest public buildings in the Roman Forum, and significant enhancements to the city's defensive walls, which withstood three sieges during his rule. These projects suggest a deliberate attempt to align himself with the grandeur of Rome's imperial past and to affirm his steadfast commitment to its preservation.<sup>1</sup>

An intriguing feature of Maxentius's coinage is the depiction of horses, often shown with one foreleg raised, a pose that was likely intentional. Drawing upon classical conventions that mirrored observed animal behavior, such a stance could be interpreted as signaling movement, readiness, or latent aggression. Within the symbolic language of Roman coinage, this posture may have conveyed a warning to Constantine, asserting that Rome, under the divine protection of the Dioscuri, was prepared to defend itself against external threats.<sup>2</sup>

**- COIN NO. 3**

**- Registration Number:36433**

**- Metal: Bronze**

**- Category:Sestertius(Sestertius<sup>4</sup>**

**- Period: Emperor Neron, Roman**

**- Approximate Date : 64 AD**

**- Description**



**1- Obverse:** the head of Emperor Nero facing right, adorned with a laurel wreath. The surrounding Latin inscription reads: **NERO CLAVD(ius) CAESAR AVG(ustus) GER(manicus) P(ontifex) M(aximus) TR(ibunicia) P(otestas) IMP(erator) P(ater) P(atriae)** “Nero Claudius, Caesar Augustus, conqueror of the Germans, high priest (Pontifex Maximus), holder of tribunician power, emperor, and father of the fatherland”.

**2- Reverse:** The reverse presents a dynamic martial scene. In the foreground, a figure, possibly a symbolic photographer or observer, captures the image of Nero, who is depicted on horseback, wearing a shield draped with a paludamentum (military cloak), and brandishing a spear. Behind him rides a soldier bearing the vexillum, the Roman military standard, slung over his shoulder. The inscription **DECVRSIO** appears along the lower edge, referring

<sup>1</sup>) Hekster, O.J., The city of Rome in late imperial ideology: the tetrarchs, Maxentius, and Constantine, 2000, pp. 9- 12.

<sup>2</sup>)[https://esc.rutgers.edu/fact\\_sheet/the-basics-of-equine-behavior/#:~:text=pawing%3A%20they%20are%20frustrated,or%20flies%20biting%20their%20legs](https://esc.rutgers.edu/fact_sheet/the-basics-of-equine-behavior/#:~:text=pawing%3A%20they%20are%20frustrated,or%20flies%20biting%20their%20legs) 14/6/2023.

<sup>3</sup>) RIC I, Nero 167.

<sup>4</sup>)<https://numismatics.org/collection/1944.100.39733> 5/6/2023

to a ceremonial military maneuver or cavalry exercise. Flanking the scene are the letters S–C (Senatus Consulto), indicating that the coin was minted by decree of the Roman Senate.

- **Analytical notes:** This coin was struck in Rome in 64 CE on a bronze flan and is classified as a sestertius. The reverse depicts two mounted cavalymen, one of whom is identified as Emperor Nero himself. The inscription **DECVRSIO**—a Latin term referring to a military maneuver, appears prominently, accompanied by the mark **S–C** (*Senatus Consulto*), indicating that the issue was authorized by the Roman Senate. According to Stevenson, the term *decursio* likely refers not to horse-racing exercises, as some have suggested, but to cavalry drills instituted by Nero, possibly connected to the formation of new cavalry units within the Imperial Guard or evaluations of the martial abilities of Rome's young aristocrats. He argues that the depiction does not support the notion of equestrian games: the horses are not shown in racing postures, nor is there a suggestion of speed.<sup>1</sup>

Rather, the riders appear poised for combat, with one horse rearing, an artistic cue commonly associated with a moment of attack or military readiness.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation is further supported by the presence of the *vexillarius* (standard-bearer) riding behind Nero, holding the military *vexillum*, a clear symbol of battlefield context, whether literal or symbolic. The scene thus appears to represent a *decursio* in its truest sense: a structured military training exercise. Nero's central position and active participation in the maneuver suggest a deliberate political message, emphasizing his martial prowess and leadership, as well as his commitment to inspiring and strengthening the Roman cavalry.<sup>3</sup>

- **COIN NO. 4**

- **Registration Number: 1002184**

- **Metal: Bellon**

- **Category: Tetradrakhma**

- **Period: Emperor Commodus,  
Roman**

- **Approximate Date: 180-181AD**



<sup>1</sup>) Stevenson, A Dictionary of Roman Coins, *S.V. DECVRSIO.S.C*

<sup>2</sup>) The Intermediate Dictionary, Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo, fourth edition, 2004, p. 888.

<sup>3</sup>) Reham Hassan Abdel Aziz, Publishing Alexandrian Coins at the Egyptian Museum in Cairo, Journal of Archaeological Research and Studies, Issue 10. Memorial, 6019, p. 12

<sup>4</sup>) Milne 2621; Köln 2, 2204.

**- Description**

**1- Obverse:** the laureate head of Emperor Commodus facing right, encircled by a Greek inscription: **Μ(ἄρκος) ΑΥΡΗ(λιος) ΚΟΜΜΟ(δος) ΑΝΤΩΝΙΝΟC Ε(βαστός)** “*Marcus Aurelius Commodus, the revered Antoninus*”.

**2- Reverse:** the emperor is depicted riding a chariot drawn by four horses while holding an olive or laurel branch, a traditional symbol of peace and victory. Above the scene the Greek inscription appears as **ΛΚΑ**, denoting the regnal year 21, corresponding to 180/181 CE.<sup>1</sup>

**- Analytical notes:** Following the death of his father, Emperor Marcus Aurelius, in 180 CE, Commodus concluded peace agreements with several frontier tribes, including the Dacians, Quadi, Iazyges, and Vandals. Upon his return to Rome, he celebrated a formal triumph on October 25 of the same year, marking the end of the northern wars. Coins such as this were commonly minted to commemorate military victories and reinforce the emperor's authority and divine favor. In this typology, Commodus is shown not simply as a triumphant ruler, but as a semi-divine figure. The imagery draws upon longstanding Roman traditions in which victorious emperors were permitted by the Senate to imitate the god Jupiter, who, according to myth, rode in a quadriga following his triumph over the Titans. This divine association elevated the emperor's status, casting the military triumph not merely as a human achievement, but as an act sanctioned and aided by Jupiter himself.<sup>2</sup>

**- COIN NO. 5**

**- Metal: Gold**

**- Category: Solidus**

**- period: Emperor Constantius II, late Roman.**

**- Approximate Date : 347-355 AD**

**- Description**



**1- Obverse:** a half-length portrait of Emperor Constantius II, shown in three-quarter view, wearing a richly detailed military cuirass and a feathered helmet crowned by a studded diadem. In his right hand he holds a spear, while in his left he bears a shield depicting a dynamic martial scene: a horseman impaling a fallen enemy beneath the hooves of his steed. The Latin inscription encircling

<sup>1)</sup> Cassius, D., Roman History, Vol. IX, Loeb edition Translated Cary, E., Loeb Classical Library 1927; <http://www.Livius.org/articles/person/commodus/> 20/6/2023

<sup>2)</sup> Fatima Ali Abbas, Scenes of War and Manifestations of Victory Illustrated on Coins and their Equivalents in Ancient Egyptian Art, Published Master's Thesis, Cairo University 2018, p. 96.

the image reads: **FL(avius) IVL(ius) CONSTAN – TIVS PERP(etuus) AVG(ustus)** “*Flavius Julius Constantius, Eternal Augustus*”.

**2- Reverse:** The reverse portrays the personifications of Rome and Constantinople seated and holding a votive shield inscribed with the following dedication: **VOT / XXX / MVLT / XXXX** “*Vows fulfilled for thirty years; vows pledged for forty years*”. Surrounding the scene is the inscription: **GLORIA – REI – PVBLICAE** “*Glory of the State*”.

**-Analytical notes:** This type, a gold solidus, was struck at the Antioch mint across three officinae (workshops): the fourth, eighth, and ninth, during two major periods: 347–355 CE and 355–361 CE. The portrait typifies the evolving iconography of late Roman emperorship, emphasizing militaristic authority and divine legitimacy. The emperor appears in martial regalia, adorned with a plumed helmet, its purple feathers functioning both as ornamental flourish and psychological warfare, instilling fear in Rome’s adversaries.<sup>1</sup>

The shield’s imagery is particularly striking: it is not merely decorative but intentionally charged with symbolic meaning. The image of a mounted warrior vanquishing a prostrate enemy recalls earlier Greco-Roman traditions where martial valor and divine sanction were conflated. This visual rhetoric aimed to emphasize imperial dominance, particularly relevant in the political context of Constantius II’s sole rule after the deaths of his brothers Constantine II and Constans. In 350 CE, Constantius began the campaign to retake the Western provinces, which had fallen under the usurper Magnentius following Constantine’s assassination. After a decisive victory at the Battle of Mursa in 351 CE and further campaigns between 352–353 CE, he reasserted imperial control over Italy and Gaul. The martial imagery on this coin aligns with these efforts to project strength and inspire loyalty within the empire, while intimidating both internal rivals and external foes.<sup>2</sup>

Such shield scenes have ancient precedents, where in Greek iconography, for instance, shields often bore symbolic figures, most famously the Gorgon Medusa on Athena’s aegis, intended to strike terror into enemies. The motif of the mounted warrior defeating an enemy is thus both a continuation and adaptation of earlier Mediterranean iconographic traditions. Furthermore, Roman art in this period did not exist in isolation. It was deeply informed by the visual and symbolic languages of earlier civilizations, including ancient Egypt, which had long been a cultural touchstone in the Greco-Roman world. During the

<sup>1)</sup> Fatima Ali Abbas, *Scenes of War and Manifestations of Victory Illustrated on Coins and their Equivalents in Ancient Egyptian Art*, p.44.

<sup>2)</sup> Fatima Ali Abbas, *Scenes of War and Manifestations of Victory Illustrated on Coins and their Equivalents in Ancient Egyptian Art*, p.44.

Ptolemaic and Roman periods, Egypt served not only as a province but also as a conduit for artistic exchange. The martial motifs seen on Constantius's coinage—dynamic combat scenes, symbols of conquest, and divine victory—can be seen as an evolution of ancient Egyptian and Hellenistic forms, reinterpreted through the lens of Roman imperial ideology.<sup>1</sup>

## **2. EGYPTIAN EQUESTRIAN TRADITIONS AND THEIR INFLUENCE ON CLASSICAL POLITICAL IMAGERY**

Horses were among the most influential animals in ancient civilizations, particularly in the realms of warfare and military development—and Egypt was no exception. The introduction of the horse fundamentally transformed Egyptian warfare and contributed to the expansion of its empire. The war chariot, previously unknown to the Egyptians, emerged as a revolutionary military innovation, with horses serving as its driving force. This advancement marked a pivotal shift in the structure and tactics of the Egyptian military. Scholars generally agree that horses were introduced to Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period (ca. 1700–1500 BCE), most likely by the Hyksos during their invasion of the Nile Delta. In his inscriptions, King Kamose—who played a central role in the expulsion of the Hyksos—makes specific reference to horses and chariots. Not long after their initial appearance, horses became a standard component of the Egyptian military apparatus.<sup>2</sup>

The earliest known depiction of a horse and chariot in Egypt appears on the walls of the temple at Abydos, in a battle scene dating to the reign of Ahmose I (ca. 1550–1525 BCE). From that point forward, the chariot drawn by horses became a recurring symbolic motif, emblematic of royal power and martial strength. Archaeological findings suggest the presence of horses in Egypt as early as 2000 BCE, including a sculpted horse figure dated to that period. Research spanning 2000–1200 BCE indicates the existence of two horse types in Africa: the so-called "Egyptian horse," likely introduced by the Hyksos and comparable to horses from the Near East, and a smaller indigenous variety found in northern and western regions of the continent. These early Egyptian horses were generally smaller than modern breeds and often came in shades of brown and reddish tones.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>) Fatima Ali Abbas, *Scenes of War and Manifestations of Victory Illustrated on Coins and their Equivalents in Ancient Egyptian Art*, p.44.

<sup>2</sup>) Litecky, T.G., *All the king's horses: stable administration in new kingdom Egypt*, Master Thesis, American University in Cairo 2021, p. 1.

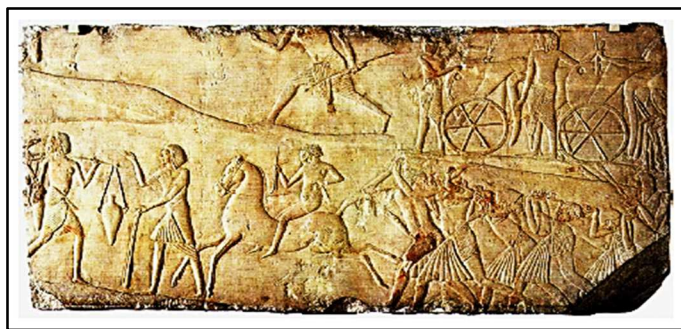
<sup>3</sup>) Tatomir, R., *The presence of horse in ancient Egypt and the problem of veracity of the horseshoe magic in the ancient Egyptian folklore and mythology*, p. 331.

Although horse riding was not widespread among ancient Egyptians, and horses were not indigenous to Egypt, they came to be closely associated with the military and aristocratic elite, especially during the New Kingdom.<sup>1</sup> Royal iconography almost exclusively depicts kings standing in chariots rather than mounted on horseback. Riding horses was not typical for transportation or battle; rather, it appeared as a form of elite sport or in exceptional military contexts. Nevertheless, some battle scenes from the New Kingdom depict mounted soldiers. A notable example is found in the reliefs from the Battle of Kadesh, carved into the walls of the Great Temple at Abu Simbel under the reign of Ramses II.<sup>2</sup> There, a soldier is shown riding a horse and carrying a quiver of arrows (**Fig. 1**), illustrating one of the few documented cases of horseback riding in Egyptian military art.



***Fig.1: A soldier on horseback, the Great Temple of Abu Simbel.  
(After:Noblecourt, Ch.& Edel,S.D.,Grand Temple d Abou Simple La Bataille  
de Qadesh, Le caire 1971, p.33).***

Horses also featured prominently in pre-battle preparations, as evidenced by a scene from the tomb of Horemheb, which depicts a man riding a horse—likely in the midst of preparations for combat while other horses are shown drawing war chariots (**Figure 2**).<sup>3</sup>



***Fig.2: Battlefield during battle preparation.  
(After:Janson, H.W., History of Art, New York, 1972, pp.48-49).***

<sup>1</sup>) Hamed, A., Sport, Leisure: Artistic Perspective in ancient Egyptian temples (Part II), Recorde, Rio de Janeiro, v.8, n.1, 2015, p. 1 – 2.

<sup>2</sup>) Tatomir, R., The presence of horse in ancient Egypt and the problem of veracity of the horseshoe magic in the ancient Egyptian folklore and mythology, p. 331.

<sup>3</sup>) Fatima Ali Abbas, Scenes of War and Manifestations of Victory Illustrated on Coins, pp. 129-130.

Additionally, a horse stable was discovered in 1999 at the ancient capital of Bar-Ramesses, built for King Ramses II, by a German-Egyptian archaeological team. Located in Qantir, in the Sharkia Governorate, approximately 115 km northeast of modern Cairo, the structure dates back approximately 3,300 years and is considered the largest and oldest known horse stable in the ancient world.<sup>1</sup>

Another example from the New Kingdom is the god Resheph, a deity of Syrian origin associated with war, who was also worshipped in Egypt during the Eighteenth Dynasty. Resheph is typically depicted as a man wearing the white crown of Upper Egypt, adorned with a deer's head and trailing longitudinal streamers. He holds a spear and either an axe, sickle, scepter, or ankh, and is characterized by a Syrian-style beard (**Fig. 3**).



**Fig.3: The god Resheph.**

(After: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/553738> (29/12/2024))

Resheph rose to particular prominence during the reign of Amenhotep II, functioning as a divine patron of horses and a protector of the monarchy. Celebrated for his power to annihilate foes in battle, Resheph was closely associated with the native Egyptian war-god Montu. A striking parallel between Egyptian and Roman martial iconography can be observed in a small plaque—possibly a bead—of steatite overlaid with a glossy glaze, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The scene depicts a mounted warrior brandishing both sword and bow while trampling a fallen enemy, poised to deliver the coup de grâce (**Fig. 4**). The composition recalls later Roman representations of equestrian dominance, underscoring a shared visual vocabulary of military triumph across the Mediterranean world.

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<sup>1</sup>) Tatomir, R., The presence of horse in ancient Egypt and the problem of veracity of the horseshoe magic in the ancient Egyptian folklore and mythology, p. 331.



**Fig.4: A small card or bead bearing the sight of a king stepping on a captive with his horse.**

**(After: Hamed, A., *Sport, Leisure: Artistic Perspective in ancient Egyptian temples (Part II)*, Recorde, Rio de Janeiro, v.8, n.1, 2015, p. 4).**

This scene closely parallels the martial imagery found on the shield of Emperor Constantius II, where a mounted warrior is depicted trampling a fallen enemy—an iconographic motif emphasizing imperial power and military supremacy.

### **CONCLUSION**

- Horses played a remarkably similar role across ancient civilizations such as Egypt, Greece, and Rome, where they were primarily used to draw chariots—whether in military engagements or ceremonial and sporting contexts.
- Beyond their functional use, horses held deep symbolic and ritualistic value. Their roles varied across cultures, encompassing military, religious, and mythological dimensions.
- In Greek culture, horses were especially linked to nature deities and sources of life. They were often associated with springs and water, believed to possess the mystical ability to reveal or open water sources with the strike of their hooves. This belief ties directly to the god Poseidon, revered not only as the god of the sea and earthquakes but also as the god of horses, bearing the epithet ἵππιος (*Hippios*). According to myth, Poseidon was both creator and master of horses, and at times took the form of a horse himself.
- The concept of immortal horses is central to Greek mythology. These divine horses, known as ἵπποι Ἀθάνατοι (*Hippioi Athanatoi*), were said to belong to the gods. Among the most notable are the four immortal horses representing the winds that drew Zeus's chariot, representing in "Euros – god of the east wind", "Boreas – god of the north wind", "Zephyros – god of the west wind", and "Notos – god of the south wind".
- These mythological associations underscore the cosmic and divine significance of horses in the ancient world, reflecting their integration into both earthly power structures and celestial narratives.

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