The Thracian Cult of Rhesus and the *Heros Equitans*

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Abstract: A survey of the available evidence for the Thracian cult of Rhesus, mainly on the basis of the pseudo-Euripidean Rhesus and of Philostratus’ Heroicus, shows that the identification of Rhesus with the so-called Heros Equitans, or “Thracian Horseman” (first proposed almost a century ago by G. Seure) rests on firmer ground than is sometimes assumed. The paper also reviews significant portions of the pictorial and epigraphic evidence for the Heros Equitans. It concludes that the parallels between Rhesus and the Heros Equitans are too striking to be ignored.

Résumé: Un relevé analytique de la documentation disponible sur le culte thrace de Rhésos, se fondant surtout sur le Rhésos du pseudo-Euripide et sur l’Heronikos de Philostrate, montre que l’identification de Rhésos avec le prétendu « Heros Equitans » ou « Cavalier thrace » (d’abord proposée, il y a près d’un siècle, par G. Seure) repose sur des fondements plus assurés qu’on ne le pense parfois. Cet article passe également en revue des parties significatives de la documentation iconographique et épigraphique pour le Heros Equitans. On en conclut que le parallélisme entre ce dernier et Rhésos est trop frappant pour être ignoré.

Introduction

The tragedy of Rhesus, traditionally attributed to Euripides,1 provides the oldest extant evidence on the cult of Rhesus in the Balkan peninsula. The rest of our information must be pieced together from late literary sources, which are not always above suspicion, and from the archaeological record. Fragmentary and open to doubt as it is, the evidence does nonetheless suggest that the cult of Rhesus, or of a figure closely related to him (specifically, the so-called Heros Equitans, on which more in section 2 below), was indigenous to ancient Macedonia and Thrace. To the extent that they can be reconstructed, matrices of Rhesus-cult that appear to be epichoric in that area are incompatible with the standard modalities of, at least, Athenian hero-cult – although they do bear comparison with some Greek cults for denizens of subterranean chambers. The

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1 On the question of the authenticity of Rhesus see most recently (with further bibliography) V. LIAPIS, “Rhesus Revisited: The Case for a Fourth-Century Macedonian Context,” JHS 129 (2009), p. 71-88; for a full-scale commentary on the play see again LIAPIS, A Commentary on the Rhesus Attributed to Euripides, Oxford, Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2012.
The topic has been dealt with in detail in an earlier article of mine; here I shall supplement that paper’s argument with considerations on the possible affinities between Rhesus and the Heros Equitans.

1. The Thracian cult of Rhesus: insights from Rhesus and elsewhere

In her aetiological narrative towards the end of Rhesus (962-973), Rhesus’ mother, a Muse, describes her son’s posthumous fate, and declares that he will not ‘go under the black earth’ (962) but will rather continue his existence by assuming a new identity as ἄνθρωποδῴξων, ‘man-god’, namely an entity betwixt and between man and deity (971). In this new interstitial capacity, the Muse says, Rhesus will inhabit forever a subterranean cavern somewhere in Mt. Pangaemum, and will act as ‘prophet of Bacchus’ (970-973). All of this has been sometimes dismissed as poetic fancy, most vehemently perhaps by W. Leaf, who invoked Cicero’s statement to the effect that there was no cult of Rhesus anywhere in the ancient world. However, apart from the fact that this can at best have been valid only for Cicero’s own time, there is no evidence that Cicero founded his statement on serious Alexandrian scholarship, as Leaf thought. On the contrary, the De natura deorum contains a number of misunderstandings and false assumptions, and Cicero does sometimes seem to have given himself a free hand in the treatment of his sources. Importantly, Cicero’s sweeping statement is contradicted by Philostratus (probably L. Flavius Philostratus), who gives in his Heroicus an account of Rhesus’ cult as it obtained apparently in his own era (3rd century A.D.). According to it, Rhesus was a hunter, a warrior and a horse-bredrer (τροφευέων τε γάρ ψαυν άτόν καὶ ἐπλησίαν καὶ θήσες ἠπτάταιν). Moreover, his altar on Mt. Rhodope was frequented by wild animals that offered themselves willingly to be sacrificed to

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5 See De natura deorum III, 45.
7 See on this point J. Rempe, De Rhes Thracum heroe, diss., Münster, 1927, p. 33.
him; indeed, Philostratus explicitly mentions a βωμός—i.e. sacrificial cult—for Rhesus on the Rhodope mountains.\(^\text{10}\) As a local deity, he was also thought to ward off pestilence (λέγεται δὲ ὁ ἵππος οὗτος καὶ λοιμόν ἄφωνιν τοῖς βροσις).\(^\text{11}\) Admittedly, with Philostratus it is never easy to disentangle factual information from fictional elaboration,\(^\text{12}\) and it was recently argued that the author of the *Heroic* subsums factual accuracy to literary or philosophical concerns more often than not.\(^\text{13}\) But even his detractors do not doubt the essential premise of Philostratus’ account, namely that a cult of Rhesus did obtain in Thrace;\(^\text{14}\) and specialist scholarship on the *Heroic* has recently rehabilitated Philostratus as a connoisseur of local and regional lore, traditions, and ritual practices, which he sought to reassert as against the Panhellenic uniformity imposed by, mainly, Homeric epic.\(^\text{15}\) At any rate, as we shall see in the following section, Philostratus’ account of Rhesus’ cult at Rhodope has a lot in common with what we know about the cult of the indigenous *Heros Equitans*; and even if Philostratus is merely confusing the *Heros* with Rhesus, this could be due at least partly to genuine cultic affinities between the two figures.

We saw earlier that, according to his mother the Muse, Rhesus will posthumously become a ‘prophet of Bacchus’ (*Rh.*, 972), and will presumably have a privileged role in Bacchic mysteries celebrated locally in the Mt. Pangaeum area by ‘those who have knowledge’ (973), i.e. the initiates.\(^\text{16}\) Assuming a special role for Rhesus in the mystic cult would be consistent with the play’s insistence both on Rhesus’ being a cousin of Orpheus (*Rh.*, 944, 966), famously an expounder of the mystery cults offered their adepts a supposedly potent kind of knowledge, from which the profane were excluded’ (quotation from *Dodds* on Euripides, *Bacchae*, 72-75); cf. *Eur.*, *Ba.*, 73-74: ταύτας τινας ἀδίνας 472-474: ἄγνοια τέχνης ἔχειν εὐδίνας βρομίων ... ἵππον δ’ ἐκείνον Σέαρκον.\(^\text{17}\) See further *LAIPI* (n. 2), p. 397 n. 83.

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\(^\text{11}\) Philostr. *Her.*, 18, 3-6 (p. 18). See also SEURE’s, *LS* (n. 9), p. 117-119 minute analysis of the passage, with discussion of textual difficulties on his p. 118 n. 5. In an earlier publication, SEURE (“Etude sur quelques types curieux du cavalier thrace”, *REA* 14 [1912], p. 137-166, 239-261, 382-390, here 382-390) had considered the Thracian cult of Rhesus as a ‘fétiche prophylactique’. For further (indirect) evidence on the cult of Rhesus in Macedon and Thrace see *LAIPI*, *LS* (n. 2), p. 395-396, 408.


\(^\text{13}\) GROSSARDT, *LS* (n. 10) I, p. 35-7, 115; vol. II, p. 438-41. Principally, Grossard is suspicious of Philostratus’ account because of the impossibility of checking its validity against independent evidence.

\(^\text{14}\) See e.g. GROSSARDT, *LS* (n. 10) II, p. 438 (comm. on *Her.*, 17, 3).


\(^\text{16}\) As was seen already by A. MATTHAI (ed.), *Euripidis tragödïae et fragmenta* VIII, Leipzig, 1824, ad 969, the reference here is to the Dionysiac mysteries, since ‘the mystery cults offered their adepts a supposedly potent kind of knowledge, from which the profane were excluded’ (quotation from *Dodds* on Euripides, *Bacchae*, 72-75); cf. *Eur.*, *Ba.*, 73-74: ταύτας τινας ἀδίνας 472-474: ἄγνοια τέχνης ἔχειν εὐδίνας βρομίων ... ἵππον δ’ ἐκείνον Σέαρκον.
of mystic lore and rites,\textsuperscript{17} and on his being a posthumous denizen of the caves of Mt. Pangaeum (Rh., 970), which is also where Orpheus’ dwelling was located according to certain versions of the myth.\textsuperscript{18} Moreover, according to an attractive hypothesis, Rhesus may have been considered the mythical ancestor of the Thracian Bessoi, who acted as prophets in the oracular shrine of Dionysus located in all likelihood on Mt. Pangaeum.\textsuperscript{19}

2. Rhesus and the \textit{Heros Equitans}

What little is known about Rhesus’ cult in Thrace has sometimes led scholars, beginning with G. Seure, to identify Rhesus, however tentatively, with a divinity whose cult was extremely widespread in the whole Thracian region, namely the so-called \textit{Heros Equitans}, or ‘Thracian Horseman’, thus named by modern scholars for lack of evidence for a more specific appellation.\textsuperscript{20} Scholarly opinion on the identification of Rhesus with the Thracian Horseman is anything but unanimous: on the contrary, it ranges from unconditional acceptance\textsuperscript{21} through cautious speculation\textsuperscript{22} to descriptive non-committalism;\textsuperscript{23} there are, of course, many who simply reject the equation on the grounds of insufficient evidence.

\textsuperscript{17} As early as the late 5th century, the Aristophanic ‘Aeschylus’ could name Orpheus as the originator of, generally, ‘rites’ (Aristophanes, Ranas, 1032 τελετάς), which could be mystery rites, although certainty is impossible (see Dover \textit{ad loc}; F. Graf, \textit{Eleusis und die orphische Dichtung Athens in vorhellenistischer Zeit}, Berlin/New York, 1974, p. 31-33). In the 4th century, Orpheus is more explicitly associated with the founding of the ‘holiest of rites’ ([Demosth.], 25.11), probably the Eleusinian Mysteries (\textit{Graf}, \textit{ad loc.}, p. 33); cf. also Plutarch, fr. 212 (ed. Sandbach). Further on Orpheus’ broad associations with mystic rites in general see L.M. Linfirth, \textit{The Arts of Orpheus}, Berkeley, 1941, p. 27, 38-104, 169-71, 189-232, 264; cf. Liapis, \textit{loc. (n. 2)}, p. 398-401.

\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Iamblichus, \textit{Vita Pythagorae} XVIII, 146 (p. 107, 3 ed. Nauck); Maximus Tyrius, XXXVII, 6 (p. 300 ed. Trapp = 440 ed. Koniaris); Himerius, \textit{Oratio} XLVI, 3 (p. 185-186 ed. Colonna).


\textsuperscript{22} E.g. Perdrizet, \textit{ad loc. (n. 6)}, p. 20: ‘peut-être Rhésos est-il, je ne veux pas dire le vrai nom, mais l’un des surnoms du personnage divin figuré sur ces stèles’ [i.e. the \textit{Heros Equitans]}.

\textsuperscript{23} E.g. W. Baegee, \textit{De Maedoeum suzis}, diss., Halle, 1913, p. 201 who limited himself to identifying the \textit{Heros as a deus a Thracibus cultum}. 
It must be admitted that the identification of the *Heros* with Rhesus is wholly uncertain. It is hardly made more credible by the fact that the *Heros*, although often identified on figured monuments with various deities (e.g. Apollo, Asclepius, Dionysus, the Dioscuri), is never explicitly associated with Rhesus. On the other hand, positive evidence for such an association would be extremely hard to come by if, as has been suggested, "ṣr̥sas is not a divine name but (perhaps in accordance with Thracian custom) a vague designation meaning 'lord', 'sovereign' or the like. Indeed, a widely accepted etymology associates the name of Rhesus with the Indo-European root *(H)reiks*, which has produced Latin *rex*, Vedic *r̥j-, Gaelic *-ric, and Gothic *rika. It is interesting that the *Heros Equitans* is sometimes addressed in inscriptions merely as *kuros, ἐσπέτως* or *ήσσος* while on several occasions the dedication *ήσσος* is accompanied by a (presumably indigenous) designation, such as Λ'ΖΗΝΩ, ΔΟΣΛΗΝΩ, ΕΙΣΑΣΗΜΗ,

24 Dionysus: KAZAROW, a.e. (n. 20), p. 1144; CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., a.e. (n. 20), no. 374; Dionysus: KAZAROW, a.e. (n. 20), p. 1143-1144; CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., a.e. (n. 20), no. 456. For Apollo and Asclepius see below n. 33.


27 Cf. e.g. SEURE, Lc. (n. 9), p. 122-127; CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., a.e. (n. 20), p. 1020, and nos. 123, 170 (H'ΩΩ [ΠΩ] ΟΠΠΑΛΑΙΩ), 252, 298, 299, 304, 322, 454, 501 (H'ΩΩ [ΠΩ] ΟΠΠΑΛΑΙΩ), 522 (DIEO ΧΑΝΤΟ ΗΗΡΟΝΙ, cf. σεμνός ... θεός said of the θηριοποίητας Rhesus in RL, 9735), 548, 589 (ΚΟΣ ΩΩ ΠΕΙΠΠΙΟ = σεμνός θεός θηριοποιός), 591.
This plurality of names calls for a brief digression. Are we dealing with different apppellations of a single god or hero? And if yes, do these apppellations correspond to different avatars of the god/hero, or are they simply evidence of a god enjoying his πολυωνυµή, or multitude of names/attributes, like Artemis in Callimachus’ Third Hymn? The latter seems more likely, in view of the fact that a high degree of individualization, such as would perhaps befit individual avatars, is precluded by the observation that the Hero’s apppellations, for the most part, do not evince any individual characteristics. They are by and large generic names singing out or invoking some of the functions a hero is expected to perform (Ἀρχαγγέλος, Ἐπιφανεία, Σύμμαχος, Σωτήρ).\(^{29}\) In other cases, they serve as localizers, pinpointing the hero’s epichoric influence (Ἀλκανάτης, Ἑλλησπόντος, Μακεδών, Πελεσίτης, Προτόλυτος),\(^{30}\) or they underline the hero’s especial association with horses (Ἱππάλαξας, Ἱππότης).\(^{31}\) Finally in a number of instances, the Hero’s apppellations evince a special connection with healing gods, notably Apollo and Asclepius,\(^{32}\) which is hardly surprising given the healing powers attributed both to the Hero (see next paragraph) and to Rhesus (see p. 97 above). In a few cases, it appears that dead (presumably heroized) individuals are depicted in the guise of the Hero, but such cases are not numerous (no more than five or six, cf. n. 30 above). The crux of the matter lies, of course, in such undecipherable apppellations of the Hero as those mentioned at the end of the previous paragraph. Given the current state of the evidence, it is simply impossible to ascertain whether they refer to aspects of the same deity or to different deities.

Nomenclature aside, Rhesus and the Ηήρος Εὐκειμένιος share striking similarities. To begin with, both of them are healing deities. For Rhesus we have Philostratus’ evidence that he was thought to ward off pestilence (see p. 97 above); the Ηήρος assumes, in a number of artistic representations, the features of Apollo or of

\(^{28}\) For a list of these apppellations see CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., o.c. (n. 20), p. 1020, and nos. 120, 126, 179, 210, 305, 309, 310-12, 446, 494, 506, 529, 576, 584. For the epigraphic evidence see DIMITROV, o.c. (n. 19), p. 39, 40, 42, 44, 48, 49, 53, 54, 70, 74, 76, 77, 79, 80, 82, 83, 92, 93, 98, 100, 101, 102, 103, 106, 109, 111-15, 118.

\(^{29}\) See CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., o.c. (n. 20), p. 1020.

\(^{30}\) A few of these apppellations, e.g. Ἑλλησπόντος or Πελεσίτης, may perhaps point to the name of a heroized dead person; after all, personal names like Ἡφαστεύς, Ἰάσων, and Θεόδωρος are found on depictions of the Horseman; cf. CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., o.c. (n. 20), p. 1020, and nos. 8, 33, 40, 76, 170, 230, 501, 537.

\(^{31}\) Cf. CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., o.c. (n. 20), p. 1020, and no. 518.

\(^{32}\) In these instances, the Hero is often identified simply as “Apollo”, “god Apollo”, “Asclepius”, “Lord Asclepius” and the like; in many cases, however, the dedication ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΙ or ἈΣΚΑΛΗΠΠΩ is accompanied by undecipherable (presumably indigenous) names, e.g. ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝΙ ΓΕΩΓΡΑΦΗΜΑΤΙ / ΖΩΟΓΑΛΑΜΗΝΟΣ / ΣΚΟΤΑΔΗΝΟΣ, or ΑΣΚΑΛΗΠΠΩ ΑΣΚΑΛΗΠΠΩ / ΚΕΜΠΕΤΗΝΟΣ / ΣΑΛΔΟΚΕΛΗΝΩΝ, etc. See further CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., o.c. (n. 20), p. 1020, and nos. 464 (cf. 593), 511, 489, 211, 315, 508.
Asclepius.\textsuperscript{33} Albeit representing a fairly rare motif, Rhesus' transformation from killer to healer is by no means anomalous. One need only think of Amphaias, a warrior as well as a seer, whose shrine at Oropus was a popular healing oracle;\textsuperscript{34} and of Achilles (with whom Rhesus has several striking resemblances),\textsuperscript{35} who had been taught the art of healing by Chiron (\textit{Iliad} XI, 831-832). The motif has several parallels in Old Irish epic, especially in the case of Finn mac Cumail, a warrior who was trained as a seer (cf. Rhesus' posthumous status as 'prophet of Bacchus', \textit{Rh.}, 972) and was in possession of a healing drink.\textsuperscript{36}

Moreover, Rhesus is famously the master of marvellous steeds,\textsuperscript{37} and Philostratus, as we saw (p. 96 above), tells us that in actual Thracian cult he was worshipped, among other things, as a horse-breeder; the \textit{Heros Equitans} is also typically depicted as a rider (hence his modern, \textit{faute de mieux} name). Further, on a great many reliefs the 'Thracian Horseman' is shown as a hunter,\textsuperscript{38} which is another point of contact with Rhesus, an accomplished hunter in Philostratus' and Parthenius' accounts.\textsuperscript{39} Remarkably, images of the 'Thracian Horseman' as a hunter are often accompanied by representations of wild animals (boars, hares, deers etc.) near altars, no doubt as a sign that they are about to be sacrificed.\textsuperscript{40}


\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Iliad} X, 435-437; Hipponax, fr. 72, 5-6 (ed. WEST); Rh., 303-304.

\textsuperscript{38} Ample documentation in CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., o.c. (n. 20), nos. 444-574, 583-603, and p. 1070-1072. For detailed discussion of ten Belgrade reliefs depicting the Thracian Horseman as a hunter see SEURE, \textit{Lc.} (n. 33), p. 48-67.

\textsuperscript{39} Philostr. (p. 96 above); Parth., \textit{Epist. Philog.}, 36 (p. 362 ed. LIGHTFOOT): (Rhesus) ἔπει δὲ ἑλέουν σέτη (sc. Arganthone) συγκυνηγεῖν.

and we recall that, according to Philostratus (p. 97 with n. 10 above), Rhesus’ altar on Mt. Rhodope was frequented by wild animals that offered themselves willingly to be sacrificed to him. Of special interest in this respect is a relief from Glava Panega (near Lukovit, Bulgaria). The upper register depicts the Hero in a hunter’s guise chasing a boar towards the relief’s right side, where an altar is shown. The lower register shows four animals (a boar, a doe, a deer, and a bull) running towards the relief’s right side. As they do so without being pursued, it has been suggested that they may be offering themselves for sacrifice, especially since the bull is kneeling just underneath the altar depicted above him in the upper register’s far right. Others, however, see here merely a variant of the regular, run-of-the-mill animal fight.

There are further similarities. As a cave-dweller, Rhesus is a chthonic figure. By virtue of his disappearing ‘inside the caverns of the silver-veined land’ in Mt Pangaeum (Rh., 970) while at the same time escaping death, Rhesus the ‘man-god’ (Rh., 971) appears to be in a position authoritatively to manoeuvre his contacts with the Beyond – hence, presumably, his central role in the Bacchic mysteries of Mt Pangaeum (see above p. 97–98). Likewise, the Heros Equitans is extensively associated with the Underworld: stelae bearing his depictions have been found in graves and grave-mounds; or depicted in the company of heroized dead; and he is extremely often shown in connection with serpents, whose chthonic associations are well around the altar), 458, 464, 469, 470, 484, 524, 560. Cf. also CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., o.c. (n. 20), p. 1031, nos. 109-112; 1032, no. 126, 126bis; 1033 nos. 146-147; 1034-1036, nos. 161-165, 171-185, 202-203, 206-213; 1037, nos. 235-238, 247-9; 1054-1056, nos. 485-514.

41 See CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., o.c. (n. 20), no. 543. The relief is fully described and discussed in SEURE, Lc. (n. 9), p. 134-136, no. 4.

42 The interpretation is that of SEURE, Lc. (n. 9), p. 135 with n. 3, 4. For further examples see D.C. SAMARI, in Dritter Internationaler Thracologischer Kongress zu Ehren W. Tomascheks II, Sofia, 1984, p. 264-289, here 288 n. 5.

43 Thus G.I. KAZAROW, Die Denkmäler des Thrakischen Reitergottes in Bulgarien. I Textband, II Tafelband, Budapest/Leipzig, 1938, I p. 72-3; M. OPPERMANN, LIMC VI.1 (1992), p. 1058. A relief from Ostia (on which see M. FLORIANI SQUARCIAPINO, I culti orientali ad Ostia, Leiden, 1962, p. 67) shows the Heros as a hunter, while a boar runs towards an altar with a hound hard on its heels. Despite TURCAN, o.c. (n. 20), p. 250, however, this does not imply that the boar is willingly offering itself to be sacrificed; for it is very obviously being chased. It is at any rate noteworthy that Ostia, where this Heros relief comes from, has yielded several funerary inscriptions documenting the presence of Bessoi (CIL XIV, 234, 236, 240; FLORIANI SQUARCIAPINO, o.c., p. 68 with n. 1; TURCAN, o.c. [n. 20], p. 250), i.e. precisely of those Thracians who probably claimed Rhesus as their ancestor (see n. 19 above).

44 See e.g. KAZAROW, o.c. (n. 20), p. 1133, 1140.

45 See HAMPARTUMANIAN, o.c. (n. 40), index, i.e. ‘funeral feast’; GOCEVA & OPPERMANN, Corpus Cultus Equitii Thrace I (as in n. 40), nos. 54, 55, 170, 171; CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC, o.c. (n. 40), nos. 64, 89.

46 See CERMANOVIC-KUZMANOVIC et al., o.c. (n. 20), nos. 56-60, 388-395, 565-570, 603, 638-639.
known.47 Finally, depictions of the *Heros Equitans* in Thrace and its environs often show him in association with Dionysus, Sileni, grapevines, and other Bacchic accoutrements,48 which cannot fail to recall Rhesus’ posthumous status as ‘prophet of Bacchus’ (Rb., 972). Sometimes, the Bacchic and the chthonic are interconnected in the iconography – as indeed they are in the person of Rhesus himself, the cave-dweller who is posthumously assigned a special function in Dionysus’ mysteries.49 Thus, on one occasion, the *Heros* is sculpted on a funerary stela of Bacchic initiates from Mt. Pangaeum, the very seat of Rhesus the ‘prophet of Bacchus’.50 Another funerary relief from neighbouring Thassos, erected in memory of Aphonios and Aphonia (presumably a married couple),

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48 See SEURIE, *a. c.* (n. 11), p. 240-242; BENOIT, *a. c.* (n. 20), p. 59-60; HAMPARTUMANIAN, *a. c.* (n. 40), nos. 33, 34, 56, 92, 293, 115; GOCCEVA & OPPERMANN, *Corpus Cultus Equitis Thracii II.1* (as in n. 40) no. 192; GERMANOVIĆ-KUZMANOVIC et al., *a. c.* (n. 20) no. 372-375, 561, 577; cf. also TURCAN, *a. c.* (n. 20), p. 230 with n. 11-13. As early as the early 20th century, PERDRIEZIT, *a. c.* (n. 6), p. 21 suggested that the *Heros Equitans* may, like Rhesus, have affinities with Dionysus, and went as far as to suggest that “il se peut que Rhésos et le *Hippoc* [...] eussent avec Dionysos des rapports d'affinité, qu'ils fussent même, en quelque sorte, des hypostases du grand dieu thrace.”


50 See PERDRIEZIT, *a. c.* (n. 6), p. 23, pl. 1; idem, “Inscriptions de Phylé,” *BCH* 24 (1900), p. 299-323, here p. 304-305 with pl. XIII.
shows the Horseman being given a (Dionysiac?) ivy-branch by a feminine figure, who as has been suggested might be a chthonic figure such as Persephone.51

This brief survey of the Herō iconography indicates that, although no predictable or consistent patterns can be established, a relatively small number of basic motifs predominates. As we have seen, the Herō is always depicted as a horseman, with further variations including the Horseman as a hunter, a healer, a cult figure associated with sacrificial ritual or with the chthonic realm, or as a warrior.52 This relatively limited range of iconographic motifs and attributes is consistent with the hypothesis that the Herō Equitans represents a single figure of cult rather than a plurality of divinities who simply happen to be depicted, more or less often, as riders. This hypothesis is considerably corroborated by the observation, substantiated in the preceding discussion, that the basic iconographic attributes of the Herō are typically associated, in myth or cult, with Rhesus.

In conclusion, the association between Rhesus and the Herō Equitans, although unprovable on the evidence currently available, is nonetheless strongly suggested by the parallelisms delineated above. The thesis for their association may be further bolstered, however indirectly, by arguments put forth in an earlier paper of mine,53 to the effect that what little may be gleaned about the cult of Rhesus in Thrace seems incompatible with the cult of Rhesus as practiced in the Athenian colony of Amphipolis. The latter conformed to well-known patterns of Greek hero-cult: the tomb where Rhesus’ talismanic remains were thought to lie was the centre of cultic activity. By contrast, the Thracian cult of Rhesus, as evidenced in Rhesus and in Philostratus, seems to have shared none of the essential qualities of this standard type of Greek hero-cult, since he had no visible tomb, merely an unspecified posthumous dwelling somewhere in Mt Pangeaum (Rh., 970–973); indeed, he was not even thought of as being dead, since his mother had arranged for his soul to be released from Hades (Rh., 962–966).