

Horses for eternity

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Horses played an important role in the life of the nomadic ancient tribes. Groups of people could travel easily to long distances and carry their goods with the help of their horses. The horse was one of the earliest domesticated animals by humans. There are several observations made to support the claim that the modern horse "***Equus caballus***" originated from Central Asia and spread to the world. Entire horse remains have been found next to the burial chamber of Asiatic rulers. There is first-hand information that ancient shamans were leading the ceremony called **The Sacrifice of the Horse**. The person holding the head of the horse to be sacrificed was called ***Baş tutkan kişi*** meaning "The person holding the head" in Turkic.

It was mentioned in **23-The Orhun Script** that the word for horse in Turkish is "At" and has a semantic relationship to "Ata" meaning ancestor. The word "At" can also be used as a verb meaning "to throw". The reason for such a second use is not coincidental and can be understood when the forgotten ancient beliefs are stirred back to the surface.

The ancient Central Asiatic people believed that the soul of a person continued to exist after death and had to traverse a dangerous underworld region populated by demons and griffins before reaching its final destination in the sky. These mythical animals (griffins and chimera) had lion claws, eagle wings and beaks and were ready to tear apart any soul that journeyed through the underworld. In order to secure a safe journey for their dead leader through the underworld the Asiatic nomadic tribes sacrificed horses as a lure for the gryphon. While the gryphon attacked and devoured the soul of the horse, the soul of the dead leader could escape and fly towards the sky. The number of horses sacrificed depended on the importance of the dead person. The more powerful the person was the more horses followed him in the grave. This is why the horse and the rider could not be separated even after death.

The horse is **thrown** to the gryphon as an offering and this is why "At" is both a noun and a verb. Recent archeological research has brought new insight in this direction. In a kurgan at Kostromskaya (north-western Russia), 22 horses were found next to the chieftain (1). At another kurgan in the Caucasus, remains of 360 horses were found.



1. Gold pectoral found at a kurgan (in Ukraine) illustrates in extraordinary detail the Asiatic lifestyle and afterlife beliefs of the nomads. The top row of the pectoral depicts scenes from the daily life, while the bottom row illustrates the underworld where wild animals reside. Several griffins are seen attacking the “soul” of sacrificed horses. **2.** On a superb carved wooden standard, a griffin slays a stag. Stags as well as horses were accepted to be distinguished enough to follow the dead leader in his journey through the underworld. **3.** Remains of horses, found in a kurgan, are being examined by an archeologist.

One has difficulty in understanding why so many horses were sacrificed after a dead person. But the following words of **Luc Kwanten** help us understand this ancient tradition (2):

The strength of the nomad lay not in numbers but in his unsurpassed skills as a horseman and a warrior. Horses, the steppe’s staple product, were available to the nomad in nearly unlimited numbers, whereas for the sedentary states they were frequently in short supply. The nomad thus possessed the advantage of mobility.

It was due to this mobility that nomadic tribes of Asia could cross large distances and form new settlements. This is why we find the symbolism of the “flying horse” in many cultures. In the Greek Mythology Pegasus is the winged white horse that flew to Mt. Olympus, where he took place in the stable of Zeus / Jupiter. One of his wing feathers fell to earth close to Tarsus giving the city its name. It is said that Pegasus bears for Jupiter the lightning and thunder.

This myth contains several clues related to our present subject. The winged horse **flies high up** toward the mythical Mt. Olympus where the main deity (Zeus / Jupiter) resides. The meaning of Pegasus is not known but when we split it into its constituent syllables we find **Pek-As-us** “we are the strong As”, where “pek” means “strong / solid”. The city of Tarsus, located on the Mediterranean coast of Anatolia could also be unfolded as **Tur-As-us** meaning “we are Tur and As”. Not far from Tarsus are the Taurus Mountains. Both Tarsus and Taurus contain the root-word “Tur” discussed already in Chapter 14. Below we see some examples of flying horses found in different parts of the world.



1. A drawing of Pegasus, the flying horse of Geek Mythology.
2. A couple of terracotta winged horses perched on the roof of an Etruscan tomb-house.
3. The statue of a winged horse found at the entrance of a burial mound in China.
4. An ancient Chinese dish with the figure of the flying horse. Below we see an Etruscan Chimera.



We can conclude that the tradition of mixing animals and creating mythical creatures such as griffins or chimera is of Asiatic origin. Therefore, cultures where such symbolism is found are clearly of Asiatic origin.

References

- (1) Ref. 4 of Chapter 7, page 202.
- (2) Ref. 5 of Chapter 1, page 11.