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**RIDING INTO LATE ANTIQUITY:
A THRACIAN RIDER RELIEF FROM
GOLEMO GRADIŠTE, KONJUH**

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the focus of the excavations at Golemo Gradište, village of Konjuh, Kratovo district, in the Republic of Macedonia, shifted from uncovering the remnants of the 6th century acropolis to investigating the lower town. This settlement apparently was established in the 5th century on the northern terrace, where evidence for Roman occupation has so far not been found. Excavations on the terrace have largely focused on two areas, the basilica and a residential complex located immediately to its north. This northern residence, which has yet to be investigated in its entirety, continues to reveal fascinating aspects of the residential component of the city on the terrace, from its Late Antique occupation as well as the periods following its partial abandonment. In the summer of 2011, excavation continued along the east side of this building (perhaps the Episcopal palace), which had been excavated by both Elena Kanzurova (2005-2006) and Goran Sanev (2007 – present). During the relocation of a rock pile associated with the residence, in order to clear its east wall, a unique artifact that had been discarded in a previous season was recovered: a relief fragment of a Thracian Rider.

The chance retrieval of this relief fragment from the spoil pile provided not only another piece of evidence for a Roman settlement, not yet located, in the vicinity of Golemo Gradište,¹ but also the first example of religious iconography associated with that settlement. The lack of an exact provenance for the relief, however, makes an interpretation of its function extremely difficult. It had certainly been removed from somewhere within the residential

¹ A number of re-used architectural blocks have been found during the excavations as well as in the vicinity of the site. Several other fragments of relief sculpture have been found on the terrace. For Roman burials and epitaphs, see the references in note 22 below.

complex, since each area of excavation had its own spoil pile. Although this is the only contextual information that we have for this artifact, the excavation notes provide a clearer picture of its likely provenance.²

Before the excavation of the residence began, a low bank was visible on the surface, running east-west across the area; parts of it have been explored during recent seasons (2006 – 2010). The bank turned out to be a roughly built stone wall, including numerous *spolia*, which was constructed sometime after the northern residence had gone out of use. Ca. 1 m wide and preserved 0.5m high, the wall did not connect with other late walls above the residence; it appeared to be a terrace wall, constructed from reused materials. Thus, our current hypothesis is that the relief fragment was removed from this terrace wall and accidentally relegated to the stone pile. An exact date for this wall cannot be determined at present; it was constructed no earlier than the late 6th century, but it could be much later.

THE THRACIAN RIDER AT GOLEMO GRADIŠTE

The relief fragment is preserved only in the lower right quadrant, and almost nothing remains of the central figure (Figure 1). Several elements may be distinguished upon first glance: a snake entwined around a tree, an altar on which rests an oval object and from behind which peeks a boar, and a bounding hound. Although the central figure is missing, it is clear from the subsidiary

figures that this relief depicted a Thracian Rider. This conclusion was confirmed when the barely visible partial leg of a horse and partial leg of the rider were discerned in the upper portion of the fragment. The placement of the horse's legs, one stationary, the other raised towards the tree, indicates that the rider is galloping towards the right.

The rider from Golemo Gradište generally conforms to standard Thracian Rider iconography. The riders are typically depicted on stone slabs 0.30-0.40 m long and 0.20-0.30 m high (our fragment is 0.28 m long and 0.17 m high), and the horse is almost



Fig. 1 Fragment of a Thracian Rider from Golemo Gradište, R. of Macedonia (Mid-to-late third century); Archaeological Museum, Skopje

Сл. 1 Фрагмент трачког коњаника из Големог Градишта, Р. Македонија (средина до краја трећег века); Археолошки музеј, Скопље

² The author would like to thank Carolyn Snively and Goran Sanev, the co-directors of the Konjuh Project, for permission to publish the relief as well as for providing the original excavation notes from the northern residence, and for several lengthy discussions about the possible contexts of the relief's original location. The relief is now part of the collection of the Archaeological Department of the Museum of Macedonia in Skopje.

always turned to the right, and shown in varying states of walking, running or standing still.³ The rider can stand alone in the relief or be accompanied by a variety of ancillary figures or elements, including other deities, hounds, boars, hares, deer, lions, altars, snakes and trees. The rider appears predominantly in Thrace, but is also found throughout its neighbouring provinces, including Dacia, Moesia Inferior, and Moesia Superior and other territories with a notable Thracian presence.⁴

THRACIAN RIDERS AS SYNCRETISMS OR ICONOGRAPHIC CONVENTIONS

The prevailing theories in Thracian Rider iconography had long assumed that the Rider was the manifestation of a large-scale syncretism of several Graeco-Roman deities, from whom the rider borrowed iconographic elements in order to distinguish himself as a particular deity in the relief.⁵ For example, the presence of a snake-entwined tree was an iconographic indicator of the cult of Asclepius or a chthonic symbol,⁶ or the depiction of a rider with a spear and with animals in the lower register represented a relief of Apollo as a hunter.⁷ In some instances, the Thracian Rider is treated as a god in his own right, referred to as Heros, a saviour god representing illness, childbirth and agriculture.⁸ Dimitrova, however, has questioned the legitimacy of these interpretations and argued for a more nuanced understanding of the iconography of the Thracian Rider. She asserts that these iconographic elements were borrowed from Greek art and were not an evolution from a native Thracian tradition. The ancillary elements in a given Thracian Rider image are largely coincidental borrowings from Greek art and have no bearing on the intended identification of the depicted individual. Moreover, many of the rider figures are indistinguishable from one another and can be identified only by the presence of an accompanying inscription and not by the inclusion of subsidiary iconographic elements.

The notion of the Thracian Rider as an iconographic convention is best illustrated by the presence of two reliefs depicting Asklepios from the Asklepion at Glava Panega in northwest Bulgaria. In one relief, Asklepios

³ N. Dimitrova, *Inscriptions and Iconography in the Monuments of the Thracian Rider*, *Hesperia* (2002) 209-229 at 209-210.

⁴ Dimitrova, *op. cit.*, 210.

⁵ The literature which discusses the Thracian Rider as a syncretism of several Greco-Roman deities is extensive, and will not be recited here. For a sample of this literature see I. Venedikov, *Le syncrétisme religieux en Thrace à l'époque romaine*, *Acta antiqua Philippopolitana* (1963) 153-166; and R. Werner, *Aspekte der thrakischen Kultur*, *Chiron* 29 (1999) 51-121.

⁶ U. Bianchi, R. Horewitz and K.S. Girardot, *Dualistic Aspects of Thracian Religion*, *History of Religions* 10 (1971) 228-233 at 231-232; Z. Gočeva, *Asklepios (In Thracia)*, *LIMC II 1* (Zürich/München, 1984) 897-901.

⁷ Dimitrova, *op. cit.*, 214. Dimitrova uses this example to illustrate the prevailing notion of religious syncretism, which she has rightfully put into question.

⁸ S.I. Johnston, *Riders in the Sky: Cavalier Gods and Theurgic Salvation in the Second Century A.D.*, *Classical Philology* 87 (1992) 303-321 at 307-308.

is illustrated as a rider, and in the other, he is shown with his traditional iconography, i.e., holding a snake-entwined staff and standing beside an altar. Both of these images bear an inscription that identifies the individual as Asklepios, but neither demonstrates a distinct disparity in meaning, function or date. In these cases, we can deduce that the image of Asklepios as a rider represents an iconographic convention, while the conventional image indicates an awareness of the traditional iconography of Asklepios and greater care on the part of the worshippers to present him in this form.⁹ In some cases, the reliefs are irreconcilable with their inscriptions. For example, a relief stela from Peštera (*IGBulg* III 1319) presents the Thracian Rider as a hunter, typically associated with Apollo, but the inscription identifies the individual as a Dioskourous.¹⁰ Thus, it is only through the presence of an inscription that the identity of each individual Thracian Rider or the intended function of the relief can be determined.

THE ICONOGRAPHIC ELEMENTS OF THE GOLEMO GRADIŠTE RELIEF

Unfortunately, the relief from Golemo Gradište does not afford us the luxury of an inscription, and the figure cannot be positively identified merely by its ancillary elements. We can, however, provide a complete analysis of its individual features and attempt a reconstruction of the relief.



Fig. 2 Relief Stela from Varna, north-eastern Bulgaria (probably third century); Currently with Vasil Radev Kurnazov in Devnja (*CCET* II, 25, fig. 204)

Сл. 2 Релеф са стеле из Варне, североисточна Бугарска (вероватно трећи век); Тренутно са Василиом Радев Курназов у Девњи (*CCET* II, 25, слика 204)

The composition of the scene is reminiscent of a number of reliefs from Thrace and its neighbouring provinces. Throughout these regions, we can see the emergence of numerous distinct iconographical elements that have a deep artistic influence on the structure of the entire relief. In several cases, the scene is dictated by an altar in the right-hand corner, on which a stationary horse rests a hoof; but in the relief fragment from Golemo Gradište, the iconographic type of a galloping horse accompanied by an altar, on which, an oval object stands, dictates the scene.

It is difficult to discern the exact nature of this oval object, as it does not display any distinguishable characteristics that would allow for a definitive interpretation.

⁹ Dimitrova, *op. cit.*, 217.

¹⁰ G. Mihailov, *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria Repertae* III (Sofia 1956) 173-174, fig. 1319.



Fig. 3 Fragment of a Relief from Razgrad, north-eastern Bulgaria (Late second or third century CE); Bzirksmuseum, Razgrad (CCET II, 95, fig. 615)

Сл. 3 Фрагмент рељефа из Разграда, североисточна Бугарска (крај другог или трећег века) музеј Бзиркс, Разград (CCET II, 95, слика 615)

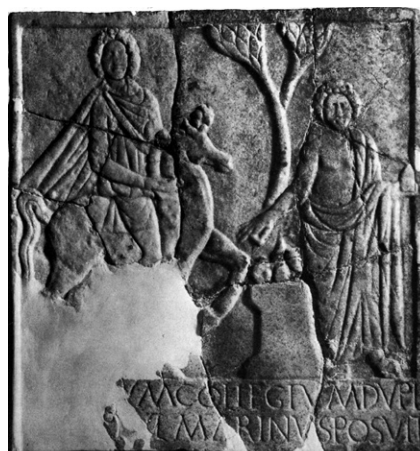


Fig. 4 Relief Stela from Slăveni (modern Gostavățu), Romania (First half of the third century CE); Museum of Oltenia, Craiova (CCET IV, 100, fig. 163)

Сл. 4 Рељеф са стеле из Славени (данашњи Гоставату), Румунија (Прва половина трећег века нове ере), Музеј Олтенији, Крајова (CCET IV, 100, слика 163)

At first glance, the oval object has a marked resemblance to an egg. No comparanda have been found in Thracian Rider imagery, however, for an egg resting on an altar. In fact, the most common iconographic element on the altar is a sacrificial flame. The flame, moreover, is always clearly defined by the presence of curving lines, which indicate the dynamic movement of the fire. It is unclear, therefore, whether the oval object from the Golemo Gradište relief represents a sacrificial flame or another object altogether. The upper portion of the object forms a slight point, which could suggest that the artist intended to portray the tip of a flame; on the other hand, there are no lines indicating the movement of the fire, which we find in almost every representation of sacrificial flames.

As far as the size and shape of the object on the altar are concerned, the closest *comparandum* for the relief from Golemo Gradište appears on a relief stela found near Varna, in Moesia Inferior (north-eastern Bulgaria). This stela probably dates to the 3rd century CE and depicts a rider wearing a chiton and a chlamys and facing right towards an altar (Figure 2).¹¹ On top of the altar is an indistinct oval object, which also does not show the typical curving lines of a flame. The weathering of the object, however, makes it difficult to identify its iconographic function, although the height and slight curve of the feature are reminiscent of the sacrificial flames in other Thracian Rider reliefs. Otherwise, besides the indeterminate object on the altar, there is little in the way of com-

¹¹ Z. Gočeva and M. Oppermann, *Monumenta Inter Danubium et Haemum Reperta* II, 1 (Leiden 1984) 25, fig. 204.

parison between these two figures. For example, decorative lines that extend towards the rider replace the snake-entwined tree here, and no animals are associated with the horseman. Furthermore, the horse is walking with its hoof at the level of the altar, whereas our horse is running, with its leg raised above the level of the altar.

A second comparable relief from Razgrad, in Moesia Inferior (north-eastern Bulgaria), has been dated to the late 2nd or 3rd century CE (Figure 3). Only the lower right-hand corner is preserved. The sole remaining elements in this relief are a hound bounding towards an altar with two indeterminate round objects resting upon it.¹² These objects are clearly not sacrificial flames, as they do not show the characteristic shape or have the curving lines that would indicate this feature. Unfortunately, only these elements of the relief have survived and, without an inscription, we cannot hope to determine to whom the relief was dedicated or the function of the round objects. Furthermore, this relief differs significantly from that of Golemo Gradište in that the snake-entwined tree is again absent from the composition. The exclusion of the tree in these two examples is consistent with other reliefs from Moesia Inferior, where the reliefs with altars and sacrificial flames (or indeterminate objects on the altar) from this province generally exclude the tree.¹³

A third relief, from Slăveni in Dacia (modern Gostavățu, Romania), presents another interesting point of comparison (Figure 4). This relief, which dates to the first half of the 3rd century CE, incorporates both a sacrificial flame and offerings on an altar. The flame appears in the background of the altar while the offerings are presented in the foreground.¹⁴ These offerings are unidentifiable and no suggestions are put forth in the publications; the middle object, however, is reminiscent of the egg-shaped object from the relief at Golemo Gradište. Otherwise, this image bears no resemblance to our relief stela. The relief from Slăveni depicts a rider whose horse is walking and who is accompanied by a second figure standing next to the altar and in front of a tree without a snake.

These three *comparanda* illustrate the problem of identifying the egg-shaped object depicted on the altar in the relief from Golemo Gradište. Few comparative elements are found in the published material, and similar objects rarely have an identified function. We must, nevertheless, take into consideration several possibilities when attempting to classify this object; firstly, that the object in the Golemo Gradište relief is indeed a sacrificial flame, although very crudely portrayed, as this seems to be the most common element found atop an altar in Thracian Rider reliefs. Secondly, we do see parallels, albeit rarely, in other Thracian Rider reliefs where indistinct objects are placed on top of the altar. In these cases, however, the objects are vaguely depicted and suggestions to their function are infrequently offered. In the case of the relief from Golemo

¹² Z. Gočeva and M. Oppermann, *Monumenta Inter Danubium et Haemum Reperta* II, 2 (Leiden 1984) 95, fig. 615.

¹³ Gočeva and Oppermann, *op. cit.*, 76 (fig. 582), 87 (fig. 602), 101 (fig. 624), and 116 (fig. 650).

¹⁴ N. Hampartumian, *Moesia Inferior (Romanian Section) and Dacia* IV (Leiden 1979) 100, fig. 163.

Gradište, the oval object does not show any of the typical characteristics of a flame, and its shape would suggest an offering, perhaps an egg. Furthermore, since the relief is extremely detailed, e.g., the ears of the boar, the collar on the hound, there is no reason why a flame would not receive the same attention.

The remaining iconographic elements in the Golemo Gradište relief are common throughout the corpus of Thracian Rider iconography, and *comparanda* can easily be supplied. In fact, the snake-entwined tree is one of the most commonly depicted ancillary elements in the entire body of Thracian Rider reliefs, appearing consistently and with great frequency in Thrace and its surrounding territories. The snake-entwined tree has an especially notable presence in Dacia, Dardania, Macedonia, and Moesia Inferior.¹⁵ The presence of the hound and the boar is also to be expected, given the region in which the Golemo Gradište relief was found. In the corpus of Dardanian and Macedonian reliefs, the hound and boar frequently accompany the rider, and in many cases, we see the presence of a snake-entwined tree and altar alongside these two elements. The combination of the Hunter-type and snake-entwined tree type is a relatively common feature of Rider reliefs in Dardania and elsewhere in the Balkan region.¹⁶

THE GOLEMO GRADIŠTE RELIEF AND THE RELIEFS OF ITS NEIGHBOURS

In a thorough analysis of the relief from Golemo Gradište, we should also compare this stela to other relief representations of riders, Thracian or otherwise, that have been found in the region. Only a few such reliefs have been unearthed, two of which were found in the district of Kumanovo, a town ca. 25 km. northwest of Konjuh. The first relief, dated to the mid/late 3rd century CE, preserves only a portion of the horse and rider in its left register (Figure 5).¹⁷ The way this relief was broken presents a situation opposite to that of the relief from Golemo Gradište; here, only the rider is preserved without ancillary figures. The image is comparable with the relief from Golemo Gradište in only two minor details, i.e., the rider gallops to the right, and the carving of the image and attention to detail are reminiscent of the manner in which the Golemo Gradište relief was produced.

¹⁵ The snake-entwined tree appears ca. 66 times in the *Corpus Cultus Equitis Thracii* (CCET) for these regions, but this does not account for the fact that the majority of the reliefs are damaged and parts are missing. It is likely that the number of Thracian Riders is significantly greater.

¹⁶ Thracian Rider reliefs of the Hunter-type are most recurrently found in the Danube region, although they also appear frequently throughout the entire Balkan region. The presence of a snake-entwined tree, altar, hound and boar, which is a mixture of the Hunter-type and the Horseman facing a snake-entwined tree-type, is a common feature in the Dardanian and Macedonian reliefs, and occurs with some regularity throughout the other regions as well.

¹⁷ A. Cermanovic-Kuzmanovic, *Monumenta Intra Fines Iugoslaviae Reperta* V (Leiden 1982) 21-22, fig. 29.



Fig. 5 Relief Stela from Kumanovo, R. of Macedonia (Mid-third century CE); Archaeological Museum, Skopje (CCET V, 21-22, fig. 29)

Сл. 5 Рељеф Стела из Куманова, Р. Македонија (средина трећег века), Археолошки музеј, Скопље (CCET V, 21-22, сл 29)



Fig. 6 Fragment of a Rider from Kumanovo, R. of Macedonia (Mid-third century); Kumanovo (CCET V, 22, fig. 30)

Сл. 6 Фрагмент коњаника из Куманова, Р. Македонија (средина трећег века); Куманово (CCET V, 22, слика 30)

The second image from Kumanovo, also dated to the mid-3rd century, is severely damaged.¹⁸ Of the two pieces of the stela, the first preserves the figure of a lion and a reclining human figure (Figure 6), and the second shows the torso of a rider uncharacteristically facing left (Figure 7). A fragment of an inscription reads *[Apo]lini ex vot(o) Festus*. Except for the presence of an animal beneath a galloping rider, in this case a lion, the two images bear little resemblance to one another. This relief is not so deeply carved, and the attention to detail, visible in both the first relief from Kumanovo and the one from Golemo Gradište, is not present.

A third relief, from the village of Dobrošane on the outskirts of Kumanovo, bears the image of a rider.¹⁹ This relief, in the Kumanovo Museum, has not been fully published and was not included in the *Corpus Cultus Equitis Thracii*; nevertheless, it seems appropriate to include it here in a discussion of the possible Thracian Rider reliefs from the area around Golemo Gradište.²⁰ This relief stela is separated into two registers, an upper register that contains the image of the rider, and a lower register that displays a damaged Latin inscription. Unlike the rider from Golemo Gradište, this one apparently stands alone in the field, although other ancillary elements could have been present in

¹⁸ Cermanovic-Kuzmanovic, *op. cit.*, 22, fig. 30.

¹⁹ The author would like to thank Dejan Gorgievski who brought this stela to my attention at the 2012 Niš and Byzantium Symposium.

²⁰ This stela was published in a small guide to the artefacts at the Kumanovo Museum. See З. Николовски, *Водич низ латидариумот* (Куманово, 1997) 30-31.



Fig. 7 Fragment of a Rider from Kumanovo (Mid-third century); Kumanovo, R. of Macedonia (CCET V, 22, fig. 30)

Сл. 7 Фрагмент коњаника из Куманова, Р. Македонија (средица трећег века); Куманово, Р. Македонија (CCET V, 22, слика 30)

Fig. 8 Tombstone with the Image of a Rider from K'šla, R. of Macedonia (Second half of the third century or beginning of fourth century); Archaeological Museum, Skopje (CCET V, 23, fig. 31)

Сл. 8 Споменик са сликом јахача из К'шла, Р. Македонија (друга половина трећег века или почетком четвртог века); Археолошки музеј, Скопље (CCET V, 23, слика 31)



the missing right half of the scene.²¹ It does bear, however, a striking similarity to another relief stela that was found very close to the site of Golemo Gradište.

The fourth and final relief was found northwest of Golemo Gradište, on the other side of the Kriva River from the site, in the area known as K'šla, where a Roman necropolis was located.²² The image on this stela, however, bears little

²¹ The inscription that accompanies the relief of this rider has not yet been published, and without knowing its contents we are unable to distinguish the function of the rider in this stela. A comparative stela from the immediate vicinity of Golemo Gradište suggests that the presence of a rider accompanied by an inscription could be interpreted as a grave marker, with the rider representing the deceased. See note 22 for this comparison. If the rider and the accompanying inscription are indeed related, it would suggest that the stela from Dobrošane may also represent a grave marker. Without the publication of the inscription, however, this interpretation remains an object of speculation.

²² See B. Dragojević-Josifovska, *Inscriptions de la Mésie Supérieure VI Scupi et la région de Kumanovo* (Beograd, 1982) 177-180, for the publication of two grave inscriptions from K'šla; another one, unpublished, is also known. See M. Ivanovski, K'šla, *Археолошка*

resemblance to the Thracian Rider relief from Golemo Gradište. The relief from K'šla forms the lower decorative section of the grave stela of a Roman auxiliary soldier (Figure 8). The simple scene shows poorer craftsmanship than the other reliefs discussed, with the exception of the Dobrošane relief. The stela depicts a solitary rider whose horse is trotting to the right and there is no evidence for any subsidiary features that accompany the horseman. This stela has been dated to the late 3rd or early 4th century based on an inscription that forms the middle register of the image. The inscription reads:

D(is) M(anibus)
 Sabino
 Antio o(ptioni)
 coh(ortis) L(usensium ?) Eu-
 porus et Fortu-
 nata pa-
 tr(ono) b(ene) m(erenti)
 p(osuerunt).
 V(ixit) a(nnis) XXXV.²³

Thus, we have the tombstone of a Roman soldier who was stationed at the military/ administrative centre or *civitas* near Konjuh. Although the settlement itself has not been located, the identification of the tombstone of a soldier from a Roman cohort, perhaps the *cohort I Thracum*, indicates that there was a Roman presence (or at least a Roman military presence) in this area in the third and fourth centuries.²⁴

DATING AND IDENTIFICATION

The loss of the central figure and the lack of an inscription make dating the Thracian Rider from Golemo Gradište a difficult task. There are several *comparanda* from both the area around Golemo Gradište and elsewhere in the Balkan region to suggest a date of the mid-to-late 3rd century. The detailed and particular composition of the scene (snake-entwined tree, hound, boar, and occasionally an altar) finds parallels with several reliefs from the province of Dardania in the 3rd century.²⁵ Two similar reliefs from the province of

Карта на Република Македонија II (Skopje 1996) 185, for a very brief description of salvage excavations in the cemetery at K'šla in 1995.

²³ Cermanovic-Kuzmanovic, *op. cit.*, 23, fig. 31. See Dragojević-Josifovska, *op. cit.*, 178-179, n. 236, for a slightly different text of the inscription and for the identification of Sabinus Antius as the centurion of a cohort of cavalry; Dragojević-Josifovska states categorically that the relief on the gravestone is not a Thracian Rider.

²⁴ Dragojević-Josifovska, *op. cit.*, 42. See V.P. Petrovic, Pre-Roman and Roman Dardania: Historical and Geographical Considerations, *Balkanica* 37 (2006) 7-23 at 13-14, for a discussion of the possibility of a Roman administrative/ mining center (*Metalli Dardanici*) near Konjuh. He notes, however, that there is a question whether the Kratovo area actually belongs to Upper Moesia or to Thrace, and he tentatively identifies the town at Konjuh as Vizi(anum), although, further evidence suggests that the settlement at Vizi(anum) was likely over by Klečovce. Cf. Dragojević-Josifovska, *op. cit.*, 44.

²⁵ Cermanovic-Kuzmanovic, *op. cit.*, figs 25, 32, 51.

Fig. 9 Relief of a Thracian Rider from Katlanovo, Kale-Skopje, R. of Macedonia (Second half of the third century); Archaeological Museum, Skopje (CCET V, 23, fig. 32)

Сл. 9 Рељеф трчког коњаника из Катланова, Кале-Скопје, Р. Македонија (друга половина трећег века); Археолошки музеј, Скопје (CCET V, 23, лист 32)



Macedonia (CCET V 34 and 48) date to the 2nd century, but the existence of a Roman settlement of the 3rd and 4th centuries near the village of Konjuh must be taken into consideration for the date of our relief.

Although the relief was found associated with the northern residence at Golemo Gradište, this was most certainly not its original provenance. It was probably removed from the still unidentified Roman settlement in the environs of Konjuh, from which one existing iconographic parallel, the stela from K'šla, has been dated to second half of the 3rd century or early 4th century based on its inscription. The closest iconographic parallel to the Golemo Gradište relief, however, is a relief from Katlanovo, on the road south from Scupi but still within the province of Upper Moesia, whose ancillary elements and sculptural technique are highly reminiscent of our relief (Figure 9).²⁶ The carving of the boar, the leg of the rider and the horse's hooves, as well as the presence of a hound and snake-entwined tree provide the closest example as to how our original relief may have appeared, although the altar is noticeably absent. This relief dates to the second half of the 3rd century and has helped to inform the dating of the Golemo Gradište relief, along with the other comparative images and the existence of a Roman settlement in the area in the 3rd and 4th centuries.

While we can provide evidence for its date and its original provenance, arriving at a conclusive identification of the figure proves to be much more difficult. Firstly, there are no definite edges or borders to the composition so it is impossible to tell if the relief is part of a larger composition (like the funeral stela with an inscription from K'šla) or if it is a single plaque displaying an image dedicated to a particular god. If we are dealing with a funerary stela, no identification is possible without an inscription, although one might speculate about the greater likelihood of the use of such an image for a Roman soldier or veteran. If it is a dedicatory stela, on the other hand, which I suspect based on its composition, any number of local or pan-Roman deities might be in ques-

²⁶ Cermanovic-Kuzmanovic, *op. cit.*, 23, fig. 32.

tion. As previously discussed, particular compositions do not necessarily reflect a specific deity and riders are often used as stock images for any individual deemed a hero or worthy of elevated status;²⁷ thus, it seems reasonable to refrain from attempting any identification of the figure without an accompanying inscription.

CONCLUSION

The relief from Golemo Gradište provides a remarkable addition to the Thracian Rider *corpora*. Although the relief is only partially preserved, it presents us with several interesting questions relating to the function and provenance of this stela. Firstly, the egg-shaped object has no direct parallel in Thracian rider iconography; if it is not, in fact, a sacrificial flame, it may be one of the first recorded instances of an egg appearing on an altar in the iconographic *corpora* of Thracian Riders. Secondly, we see the re-use of materials from Golemo Gradište and the nearby Roman settlement in the later terrace wall; although probably most of the Roman material had already been used as *spolia* in the Late Antique town, it is possible that the Roman settlement was still being quarried for material after the northern residence had been abandoned. The location of the Roman settlement remains unknown, but the presence of a late Roman Thracian Rider at Golemo Gradište together with the discovery of the inscribed funerary relief from K'šla provides evidence for occupation of the area from the Roman period into Late Antiquity. Finally, while we cannot positively identify the figure in the relief without an inscription, nevertheless we can see the influence of Thracian Rider iconography in the region of Dardania well into the 3rd and 4th centuries CE.

Сабрина Хиггинс

КОЊАНИК У КАСНОЈ АНТИЦИ: РЕЉЕФ ТРАЧКОГ КОЊАНИКА ИЗ ГОЛЕМОГ ГРАДИШТА, КОЊУХ

Овај чланак представља недавно откривен фрагмент рељефа трачког јахача са ископавања на Големом Градишту, Коњух, у већ постојећи корпус слике трачког јахача. Сам рељеф само чува своје пратеће елементе (дрво са испреплетеном змијом, олтар, дивља свиња и пас), једва видљиви део ноге коња и делимично нога јахача. Рељеф из Големог Градишта умногоме одговара стандардној иконографији трачког јахача, међутим, постоји један елемент који позива на даљу анализу. Овај елемент је предмет овалног облика који почива на олтару. Типично, очекивали бисмо да тај предмет прикаже жртвени пламен, али у овом случају предмет нема оштар врх или криве линије што би указивало на динамичан покрет ватре. Уместо тога, чини се да наш олтар приказује неодређени предмет, можда више јаје, него карактеристичан пламен.

Поред тога, чланак истражује могуће порекло овог рељефа, јер ми не бисмо очекивали да пронађемо трачког јахача у касноантичком насељу. Постојање у III или IV веку насеља близу Големог Градишта указује вероватно порекло, а такође обавештава

²⁷ Dimitrova, *op. cit.*, 222.

датирање рељефа. Датовање нашег трачког коњаника је даље сагледано са неколико упоређивања из околних села, који су помагли у одређивању датума од средине до краја III века за рељеф. Дакле, трачки коњаник из Големог Градишта уводи нови детаљ у садржај рељефа трачког коњаника и даје пример утицаја јахачког типа који је имао на уметнички репертоар Дарданије у III и IV веку.

